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## OUR LORD'S TEACHING



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1906



## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

THIS book is of a kind comparatively new, as yet, in our country. Familiar as are our Lord's words in the Gospels, it has not been customary with us to isolate His teaching, or to inquire what and how much we may believe on His own direct authority. Nor have we gone first to Him for the form in which to hold our Christian beliefs. The theology of St. Paul so powerfully affected the Reformers, did so great a work through their means, and has continued so to mould our religious belief that, in reading the Gospels, it has been our unconscious habit to arrange what we found in them according to the system of doctrine which we owe to that great Apostle. In our practice the theology of the Apostle has been taken as primary, that of the Master as secondary. The teaching of Jesus has been greatly hidden behind that of Paul, and we have not been accustomed to see it in the form and outline natural to itself. By many recent influences the attention of the Church has been called to this, and there is now an increasing desire to go "back to Christ," as it has been expressed, and to know our Christian faith first of all in its most primitive, most authoritative, and most truly universal form. The chapters that follow are an endeavour to meet this desire, so far as it can be done in accordance

with the requirements of this series of text-books—that the language be plain, that the treatment be brief, and that previous acquaintance with theology be not required. I send out what I have written in no spirit of over-confidence. I am, indeed, so far from content with it that I could willingly have written it again from the beginning, if I had felt assured that I could bring it much nearer to my own ideal of a book on our Lord's teaching. I encourage myself by the thought that much that I have written has come to me as light from our Lord's words in the need and experience of life, and by the belief that truth so received can hardly fail to prove of some value to the young men and women for whom this series of volumes is first intended, as well as to other readers.

All the four Gospels have been assumed as authentic sources of our Lord's teaching. The Gospel of St. John gives that teaching with so great differences that it is difficult to combine what we read in it with what we find in the others. But their fundamental harmony has had recently such successful vindication, that I have felt that the difficulty should not be insuperable, and that separate treatment of the discourses in St. John should not be had recourse to.

The quotations of Scripture are, throughout, from the Revised Version.

I have to acknowledge the help of friends, and especially of Dr M'Clymont, Joint-Editor of the series, in revising the proofs.

JAMES ROBERTSON.

## PREFACE TO ENLARGED EDITION

FROM letters which I have received since this book was first published I gather that there are very many people in the present time who desire, within brief space, some assured guidance in the knowledge of our Lord's teaching. They are, speaking generally, not persons who wish to depreciate the teaching of St. Paul or St. John. But in the study of these Apostles they find themselves drawn within circles of difficult controversy. They therefore long for what is our Lord's own: they are ready to believe all that He certainly taught: they would wish to make this the foundation of their life.

It has been no small satisfaction to me to learn that this book has been helpful to readers of this class, some of them far off in remote Colonial life. Having them in view, as well as the members of our Church Guilds, I have added in this enlarged edition, besides some notes, three chapters which seemed to be required by present difficulties and currents of thought. The first is a supplementary chapter (V<sup>A</sup>) to give further help on the vital subject of our Lord's teaching about Himself. The second (XIII) is intended to help readers who have been embarrassed by questions regarding Prayer. It gives a short review of these questions and of our Lord's teaching on the subject.

The third (XV) is a chapter supplementary to the whole book, on the fourth Gospel as compared with the other three. Its aim is that readers may know how this much-debated matter stands, and may feel assured in regard to those Gospel records on which our knowledge of the teaching of our Lord almost wholly depends.

In carrying the volume through the press I have been indebted to both the Editors, and also to the Rev. R. S. Kemp, B.D., of Insch, whose revision of "proof" has been of special value.

JAMES ROBERTSON.

*September 1897.*

In the edition now being issued a note is appended to the concluding chapter, bringing up to date the review of present-day discussion regarding the trustworthiness of the Gospels.

J. R.

*October 1905.*

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HIM evermore I behold  
Walking in Galilee,  
Through the cornfield's waving gold,  
In hamlet or grassy wold,  
By the shores of the Beautiful Sea.  
He toucheth the sightless eyes ;  
Before Him the demons flee ;  
To the dead He sayeth : Arise !  
To the living : Follow me !  
And that voice still soundeth on  
From the centuries that are gone,  
To the centuries that shall be !

H. W. LONGFELLOW.

# OUR LORD'S TEACHING

## CHAPTER I

### THE MANNER OF HIS TEACHING

THE teaching of Jesus is a subject which in these days it is fitting we should study afresh. In an age like ours, when so many things are questioned, it is of great advantage if we can find something to start from about which there is general agreement; and it is agreed among all men whom we need take into account, that Jesus is the greatest religious and moral Teacher whom the world has seen. Many in our day who refuse our creeds, and put them aside as full of doctrinal subtleties, still declare themselves believers in the Sermon on the Mount, and ready to listen to the teaching of Jesus. Even in heathen countries like India there are found not a few who, without joining themselves to the Christian Church, have come thus far, that they venerate Jesus as the Great Teacher. And within the Church itself a necessity is widely felt to go back to Jesus Himself, and to see what are the consequences of listening to Him afresh and alone, assuming only that, whatever else He was, He was and remains the world's Great Teacher in religion.<sup>1</sup>

*Jesus, by  
general con-  
sent, the  
Great  
Teacher*

<sup>1</sup> See note at the end of the chapter.



*This  
manner*

We may begin our study of His teaching with what is most outward in it. We may try to call up before us the aspect of the Teacher, and the characteristic manner in which He taught.

*Physical  
features of  
it. His  
counte-  
nance, dress,  
utterance,  
attitude,  
look*

His face we cannot picture to ourselves. No portrait of Him survives that is not hundreds of years later than His time; and though in some ages He was spoken of as mean in aspect, and at other times as, in all respects, the flower of humanity, this was simply a reflection from the suffering or triumphant state of the Church at the time. The Gospels tell us of the lifting up of His eyes as He prayed, of His sigh at the sight of suffering, of His deeper sigh in meeting with moral perversity, and they tell of marked changes in His countenance; but they describe no feature of it. He wore no distinctive dress, such as either the prophets or the Rabbis wore, but only the garments usual in the common rank of life from which He came forth. His voice and utterance were, in general, of a calm solemnity, without vehemence, and without agitation. Only this is consistent with His language and His attitude; for He *sat* in preaching, whether in the synagogue, or on the mount, or in the boat when speaking to the people on the shore. But there were times when, being more deeply moved, He raised His voice—"Jesus stood and cried" (John vii. 37). Once His voice was broken with sobs and weeping, and there were times when the special feeling or sympathy in His tones so impressed the memory of those who heard, that the very syllables He spoke in the Aramaic tongue have been preserved (Mark v. 41; vii. 34). That His look had power we know from the effect it had on men's evil consciences; as when it sufficed to drive before Him the traders who profaned the Temple.

*Spiritual  
features  
of His  
manner—(1)  
authority*

Passing from these physical features, the great spiritual characteristic of His manner in teaching was *authority*. This was what first struck His Galilean hearers, "He

taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes" (Matt. vii. 29). The scribes taught nothing without justifying it by quotation from the famous Rabbis. Jesus appeals to none; He seldom even reasons. It is enough for Him to announce the truth. His own assurance of knowing the truth is absolute. Here a great contrast appears between Him and Socrates, the one teacher of our Western world with whom Jesus might be compared. Socrates did not profess to know, but to be in search of truth. Jesus never speaks as if in any doubt; He is certain on every subject with which He directly deals. And He always speaks as if His word were enough—"I say unto you," or "Verily I say unto you," or "Again, I say unto you." He places His own words on a level even with the Old Testament Scriptures, of which He said that they "cannot be broken," and that He came not to destroy them, but to fulfil. In the Sermon on the Mount He quotes commandments from these Scriptures, and then extends, or even corrects, them by His own authority—"Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not kill . . . but I say unto you, that every one who is angry with his brother shall be in danger." "Ye have heard that it was said to them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself . . . but I say unto you, Swear not at all." "Ye have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: but I say unto you, Resist not him that is evil" (Matt. v. 21 ff.). He does indeed say, "My teaching is not mine, but his that sent me," and "The word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father's who sent me" (John vii. 16; xiv. 24). But in this "high humility" His tone of absolute authority in the sphere of religion is not lowered.

Two features of Jesus' manner in His teaching may next be named together, because they appear at first so <sup>(2) gracious-</sup>ness,

opposite, and because it is remarkable that they should exist together in so high a degree, viz. *graciousness* and *severity*. How gracious are such words of His as these: "Daughter, be of good cheer; thy faith hath made thee whole" (Matt. ix. 22). "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32). "Let not your heart be troubled:" ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions . . . I go to prepare a place for you" (John xiv. 1, 2). A tender graciousness appears continually in His words to sufferers, and in His acts of healing. It shows itself in His taking up little children into His arms to bless them, and in the personal attraction which even those who had lost character felt in Him. "Now all the publicans and sinners were drawing near unto him for to hear him" (Luke xv. 1).

But side by side with this we must place His frequent sternness. How severe were His reproofs to His own disciples, as when He said to the foremost of them: "Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art a stumblingblock unto me" (Matt. xvi. 23); or, in reference to another of them: "Did not I choose you the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" (John vi. 70). How stern were His words to the Pharisees, especially in that last public discourse, of which the refrain, often repeated, is: "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (Matt. xxiii.). This discourse swells with indignant scorn, and comes nearer *passion* than any other of His utterances. Nor can we shut our ears to the exceeding sternness of tone with which Jesus speaks of the final judgment of God, as where He says, "Their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (Mark ix. 48); or where He pronounces the words, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into the eternal fire" (Matt. xxv. 41). In all He utters there is an invariable gravity. Familiar and condescending as He is, and deeply com-

passionate, no word ever comes from His lips which we can describe as light or humorous.

There yet remain many sayings of Jesus the tone and manner of which seem to require some stronger word than we have used as yet—sayings which have in them not authority only, but *majesty*, and that beyond all the measures of men. One of these is the invitation, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. xi. 28). What *majesty* of grace and power is in these words! How great, too, this other saying, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink” (John vii. 37). And these proclamations of Himself—“I am the bread of life”: “I am the light of the world”: “I am the resurrection, and the life”: “Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice” (John vi. 35; viii. 12; xi. 25; xviii. 37). Some indeed have found fault with these sayings as going too far in self-assertion, and have rejected them as unworthy of Jesus. But in this they oppose themselves to the general consent of Christian souls, who have felt in all ages that Jesus had a right so to speak, and that what would be unfitting in others was fitting in Him.

So now already, even in considering the manner and tone of His teaching, does it not begin to appear that we cannot rest in the assumption about Jesus with which we began? We cannot call Him the *greatest* Teacher of religion and stop there. We must either deny Him that title and withhold it—describing Him rather as touched with fanaticism and self-delusion—or we must give Him a greater title still; for no man, who is like other men, can fitly say in this world of so great trouble and sin, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”; or in this world of unsatisfied hearts, “If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink.” He who is great enough to speak thus, must surely far outreach the limitations by which other men

*A transcendent Person.*

are bounded. We may leave unfixed the title that should be His, and we may wait to learn more from what He taught about Himself; but very soon in our study of the words of Jesus we find it impossible to keep, even if we would, within the assumption that He was the greatest of human Teachers—that, and nothing more.

*Note.*—In confirmation of the opening paragraph, and of what we assume to start with, two quotations may be given here, the one from Mr. John Stuart Mill, whose eminence in the philosophy of this century is well known, as well as his remoteness from orthodox Christian faith and hesitation in regard to any kind of theistic belief, the other from Mr. George Romanes, eminent in biological science, who, though he returned to the Christian Church before his death, was, when he wrote what we give here, utterly sceptical about the existence of God at all.

"About the life and sayings of Jesus there is a stamp of personal originality combined with profundity of insight, which, if we abandon the idle expectation of finding scientific precision where something very different was aimed at, must place the Prophet of Nazareth, even in the estimation of those who have no belief in His inspiration, in the very first rank of the men of sublime genius of whom our species can boast. When this pre-eminent genius is combined with the qualities of probably the most moral reformer and martyr to that mission who ever existed upon earth, religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching on this man as the ideal representative and guide of humanity; nor even now would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation of the rule of virtue, from the abstract into the concrete, than to endeavour to so live that Christ would approve our life."—From *Three Essays on Religion*, by J. S. Mill.

"Whether Christ be regarded as human or divine, all must agree in regarding the work of His life as by far the greatest work ever achieved in the history of the human race. . . . The personal character of Christ is of an order *sui generis*, and even the most advanced of sceptics have done homage to it. The more keen the intellectual criticism, the greater is the appreciation of the uniqueness of the personality. Men may cease to wonder at the effect of Christ's teaching; for, given the wonderful personality, all the rest must follow. Whatever answers different persons may give to the questions 'What think ye of Christ? Whose son is He?' every one must agree that 'His name shall be called Wonderful.'"—Address at Toynbee Hall on "Ethical Teaching of Christ," by G. Romanes (1889).

## CHAPTER II

### THE METHOD OF HIS TEACHING

A GREAT teacher of truth has usually something notable in his *method*. The method is so important, and contributes so much to make way for the truth, that we often perceive a teacher's success to be chiefly due to what we call his "way of putting things." We may expect, then, to find the method of Jesus greatly worth our study. Probably it will baffle us to apprehend it fully, or to discover all its reasons; but what we can trace of it will certainly be instructive. *Importance of method.*

At the very outset, we notice that this greatest religious Teacher did not commit His lessons to writing. He left no book. His teaching from first to last was oral. He cast it forth upon the winds of Galilee, and committed it to the memory of peasants. This need not for a moment suggest a doubt whether He expected His teaching to endure among men. He Himself said, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away" (Matt. xxiv. 35). This confidence of His is the grander that He wrote down nothing. *Jesus' teaching was  
(1) oral,*

Nor was the teaching of Jesus systematic or scientific in its method. Any one will perceive this at once who will consider what a difference there is between His manner of teaching and a confession of faith, or articles of religion, *(2) occasional,*

or a system of theology. In contrast with these, His teaching was *occasional*. It took its shape from the opening, and the need, of the occasions that arose. It had, therefore, an extempore character. And yet it does not, on this account, lose universality of meaning. How obviously from the occasion Jesus spoke in His interview with the woman of Samaria; yet how universal is the reach of the words, "God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John iv. 24).

(3) *adapted  
to His  
hearers,*

And along with this occasional character of the teaching of Jesus goes another and similar feature of His method, its invariable *adaptation to His hearers*. This is the quality for want of which, perhaps, preaching most frequently fails. It is conspicuous in the preaching of Jesus. Although He meant His teaching to be universal, it is expressly fitted for Jews, and Jews of that time. How expressly for them is such a saying as this: "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. v. 20). He assumes also constantly that the Old Testament is believed and known; and the errors, formalisms, and hypocrisies which He assails are those of the time and country. "The teaching of Jesus, surviving as it does in such power to our day, is a proof that the teaching which is most true to the occasion and to the audience of one age, may be the most abiding in its instructiveness to the ages that come after."

(4) *popular,  
yet profound  
and uni-  
versal.*

This double character—of adaptation to the audiences who heard Him and permanent significance—is partly accounted for by this next feature of the teaching of Jesus, its *popular* character. We do not so speak of it in any vulgar sense. It was as far as possible from being suited to flatter the people, or to tickle their ears by oratorical device. But it was fitted in the highest degree for popular apprehension, and "the common people heard

"Him gladly" (Mark xii. 37). It had this fitness because He more constantly than any other great teacher, directed His appeals to the instinct for truth and right that is common to man, and in respect of which rich and poor, learned and unlearned, are on the same level. He challenged the witness which the best in man bears to the truth of God. In harmony with this we find the teaching of Jesus simple in language, profound in meaning. "It joins in the highest degree possible," says Wendt, "popular intelligibility and rich significance." So it has a wonderful breadth of adaptation at once to great minds and to the simple in understanding. It is at once *popular* and *universal*.

Its popular intelligibility is greatly helped also by *simplicity of language*, and by the constant use of *apt example* and *felicitous comparison*. Every one will recollect how Jesus carried home His teaching, so that it could not be misunderstood or forgotten, by examples taken from life, such as the low expressions used in reproach ("Raca," "Thou fool"), the case of bringing the gift to the altar, and the incident of the widow who gave the two mites. Often a lesson of Jesus, stated shortly, in the form of an example, has wonderful clearness and reach. "Whosoever shall give to drink . . . a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, . . . he shall in no wise lose his reward" (Matt. x. 42). The abundance also of His use of comparisons may be observed in every page of the Gospels. The parables, unique perhaps in literature, come first to our minds as instances. But shorter comparisons, with figurative and allegorical touches, are continually giving vividness to what He says, and making it memorable to every mind. So the familiar objects and common human labours of the time and country appear in the Gospels, serving spiritual uses—the fowls of the air, the lilies of the field, the shepherd and the sheep,

*Its popular-  
ity helped by  
(a) sim-  
plicity of  
language,  
(b) use of  
examples,*

*(c) use of  
similitudes,*



the bondman ploughing or feeding cattle, the lamp ~~of~~ the stand, the hen with the chickens under her wings. As we read the teaching of Jesus, we find it alive with example, figure, and similitude, and the similitude so fits and is so subordinate to what is taught, that attention is never drawn to it but to the truth. The "rich significance," named above, is given not only by the weight of the truth conveyed, but by the rare conciseness of expression, often in proverbial and antithetic form. "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark ii. 27). "With what measure ye mete, it shall be measured unto you" (Mark iv. 24). "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth" (Matt. xii. 30). "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted" (Luke xviii. 14). All these features of the teaching combine to make it at once popular, memorable, and fruitful of instruction.

(d) *pro-  
verbial con-  
ciseness.*

Another feature in the method of Jesus is, that He often puts the truth in a form intentionally *surprising*, or *paradoxical*, or apparently *impracticable*. How surprising, for example, the opening of the great sermon in St. Luke—"Blessed are ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God." "Woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation" (vi. 20, 24). These were especially surprising words to Jewish hearers, who thought riches a sign of the favour of heaven. How paradoxical, again, such sayings as these—"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark ii. 17). "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. xvi. 25). "If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 26). How impracticable, again, seems this

(5) *His  
teaching  
often para-  
doxical.*

Rule—"Whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him twain" (Matt. v. 41).

Now it must be remembered, in order to appreciate this feature of the method of Jesus, that a great difficulty in the way of a teacher of new truth is, that the people he deals with may already think they know, while they do not. The Jews of that time thought they knew about the kingdom of God, but were greatly mistaken; they thought that temporal prosperity was the foremost thing in it, and that they themselves had a sure right to that kingdom as children of Abraham. The great difficulty with such hearers was in what they had to *unlearn*. They must learn and unlearn at the same time. Now the often startling and paradoxical form of the sayings of Jesus was happily fitted for this. Their old beliefs received a shock; they could not suppose that they knew already what He had to tell; their minds were stirred to think afresh; they were set a problem which it would do them good to think of. *Reasons for this.*

And, indeed, according to the character and aims of Jesus' kingdom, a supreme need of all men—not of Jews only—is the stirring and cultivating of moral thoughtfulness in themselves.

The aim of Jesus, in teaching about duty, is not so much to secure that good deeds be done, as to make good men—to cultivate in men a spirit like His own. Now for this it is necessary that men have their consciences exercised to know good and evil. It is profitable for them to have the discipline of seeking the truth, and coming to know it better the more earnestly they seek it. So their interest in truth is tested, and their love of it grows as they advance in knowing it. The search for truth brings blessing to the character as well as the actual knowledge of it. Accordingly, many of our Lord's teachings are so expressed as to be in a high degree stimulants of thought,

and their purpose is quite as much to stimulate as to reveal. They are surprising, paradoxical, enigmatical, and arouse the mind by the difficulty of receiving them as true. The mind is kept by them in the attitude of inquiry and progress. We read, for example, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus: "Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things: but now here he is comforted, and thou art in anguish" (Luke xvi 25). This has the strange appearance of teaching that the rule of God's judgment after death is simply to reverse the condition in the earthly life, and that the rich and poor will then exchange places. So some allege that Jesus does here teach. But surely it is foolish to think so. The purpose of Jesus rather is to stir moral thoughtfulness about the great and unexpected changes another life will certainly bring. These sayings again: "Whosoever smiteth thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also"; "Whosoever shall compel thee to go one mile, go with him twain"; "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away" (Matt. v. 39, 41, 42), how powerful they have been, not in their literal fulfilment, for an actual turning of the other cheek might be done by a self-complacent legalist, but in stirring Christian hearts to think how to put away revenge, to forbear the assertion of rights, and to live in love with those that are evil. They serve then purpose by continually setting us a moral problem to solve. They are intended "to arouse the conscience, by baffling the understanding." They indicate principles of conduct all the more plainly that they are impracticable or futile as rules.

(6) *It was with reserve, and unfolded as men were able to bear it.*

One other feature of the method of Jesus was that His teaching was with reserve, and unfolded as men were able to bear it. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now" (John xvi. 12). He kept back

months till the hearers might be more ready to receive them. A signal instance of this is the way in which he kept in the background His claim to be the Messiah, and delayed announcement of it. He spoke of Himself usually as "The Son of Man," a title not current among the people for the Messiah. He delayed announcing Himself, because the expectation they had in regard to the Messiah was so carnal and earthly—that, namely, of a conquering king, who would give the Jews a supreme place among the nations. It is obvious that if Jesus had early given Himself out plainly as the Messiah, He would have been utterly misunderstood. He would have meant one thing by that name; His hearers would have understood quite another thing. So He chose to labour among them, as it were, *incognito* for a time. It seems to have been His purpose that they should first have opportunity, in this way, to know Him as He was in Himself, if so be that the reality of His character and the spirit of His teaching might in time be felt by them to surpass what they expected in their Messiah—might displace their crude earthly expectations—and they might come to feel Him more worthy of the title, *The Christ*, than the earthly king they looked for.

There is an apparent exception to this reserve of His, which may be said to prove the rule. Early in His ministry at the well of Jacob, He said to the woman of Samaria, when she spoke of Messiah coming: "I that speak unto thee am he" (John iv. 26). This is a startling and solitary plainness on the part of Jesus. It stands alone at that period. But it will be seen from the woman's words, "He will declare unto us all things," that her expectation was less of a king than of a prophet. Among the people of Samaria there was less to overcome of false expectation and earthly hope. Jesus could say among them what He could not say among the Jews;

and this plain announcement at the well of Jacob, "I that speak unto thee am he," only brings more into view, by contrast, the long reserve of Jesus in His teaching among the Jews.

The subject of this chapter—the method of Jesus—is seldom thought of by ordinary readers. Nor are they to blame for this. The very perfection of His method leads to its being unobserved. The result of this perfection is that the whole impression the mind receives is of the greatness and preciousness of the truths conveyed. But by study of His method we can trace it out in part; we can obtain some glimpses into the wisdom of its adaptation to His great purposes, and sometimes our interpretation of His words will be the more just and the more sure that we have become aware of such features of His method as those which we have here reviewed.

## CHAPTER III

### THE GREAT SUBJECT OF HIS TEACHING

SINCE it is so widely agreed that Jesus is our greatest Teacher, we come with interest to the question, What was the great subject of his teaching? Probably many readers of the Gospels would say, if they must give an answer at once, that the great subject of the teaching of Jesus was—*how a soul can be saved*. That is what they look into the Gospels in search of, and they would think it safe to say that the great subject of Jesus' preaching must have been a sinner's salvation.

*His great subject was the Kingdom of God.*

Certainly Jesus did not forget that or leave it out, but His great subject we find, in reality, to have been—*the kingdom of God*. The first three Gospels ring all through with news of the kingdom, and it is also named in the Gospel of St. John. His preaching began with it—"From that time began Jesus to preach, and to say, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand. . . . And Jesus went about in all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. iv. 17, 23).

*This shown to be so by a review of His teaching.*

In the Sermon on the Mount, which was the first great utterance of His mind and message, the kingdom of God—or the kingdom of heaven, which is the same thing—is spoken of all through. The sermon begins: "Blessed are

the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." A large portion of the sermon has for its text, "Except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven." Again we read in it, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness"; and "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." In fact, the Sermon on the Mount, and the corresponding one in the Gospel of St. Luke, might be summed up under two heads—the Kingdom of God, and the Righteousness of the Kingdom.

When Jesus, at a later stage of His ministry, began His remarkable method of teaching by parables, He opened parable after parable with the words, "The kingdom of heaven is like," or "Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God?" (Matt. xiii., Luke xiii.).

When He sent forth His twelve apostles, the commission He gave them was this, "As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. x. 7). When He sent forth the seventy others, He bade them say, "The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you," and if in any city the people would not receive them, they were to wipe off the dust from their feet and say, "Howbeit know this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh" (Luke x. 9, 11).

Many other sayings of Jesus will occur to readers in confirmation of what has been said, as, for example, these that follow :—"If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the kingdom of God come upon you" (Matt. xii. 28). "Suffer the little children to come unto me; forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark x. 14). "Verily I say unto you, Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. xviii. 3). "Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you" (Matt. xxi. 31). "Thou art not far from the

Kingdom of God" (Mark xii. 34). And the eminence of the subject shows itself very plainly in the Lord's Prayer, in which, after words which may all be described as of adoration, the first great petition put into our mouths is this, "Thy kingdom come."

Now let us observe, in regard to this great subject of Jesus, that *it was one very suitable for His hearers*. It would catch their ears at once, because it was the very thing they were already thinking about and most interested in

*The subject  
was suited  
to His  
hearers.*

"There is a good time coming." Often have people cheered themselves with this hope. Sometimes the whole population of a country gets filled with hope of "a good time coming," and is persuaded that it is at hand. History tells us what hope of a good time coming was in men's minds at the time of the French Revolution in the eighteenth century. An old world was passing away, and a new world coming in its place. The watchwords of the new time were Liberty, Equality, and Fraternity. The Rights of Man were eagerly discussed. Not merely people in France, but many in other countries, and some of our greatest poets (as Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey), were full of eager hope in the belief that a time of great blessing was near, especially for the large body of the people who had suffered under disadvantage and contempt; that a time was at hand when extreme poverty would be brought to an end, suffering immensely diminished and all human life irradiated by love and honour.

There is nothing perhaps in modern life so fitted as this hope to give an idea of the state of mind of the Jewish people, when Jesus began to teach and preach among them. They were expecting "the good time coming," but their name for it was "the kingdom of God." Their ideas of what the good time would bring were different from those of our modern world, but also with strong resemblances; and the hope of it, deep in



their hearts, had been fanned into a flame just before Jesus began to teach, by the startling appearance and fiery preaching of John the Baptist, who announced to the multitudes who came to him, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand." The great subject, then, of the preaching of Jesus was signally fitted to catch the attention and enchain the interest of His hearers. It was directly in line with their most earnest expectations.

*It was in  
the line of  
God's pre-  
paration in  
history.*

Another thing we may observe about this subject—it was in line with the previous history of the Jews and God's guidance of that history. The subject Jesus spoke about was, in fact, that for which a divine preparation had been going on for ages. For, from whence did the Jews get that strong expectation of a good and glorious time? They got it from the prophets whom God had sent, who had helped to guide their history, and who had expounded to them its divine meaning. The old history, upon which they looked back with pride, had itself been a "theocracy"—that is, a "kingdom of God." Their kings, from David downwards, had been vicegerents of God, who was their real King. Such, at least, was the right understanding of their position and duty, and the glory of the history of the people was just in so far as they realised this ideal. And they had learned from their prophets to think of this, not as merely past, but as again to return—to return in a far more glorious form than it had ever attained in the past, in a form in which the real and the ideal would be one. The king would be another David (Ezek. xxxvii. 24), or Son of David, with a divine favour on Himself, and a divine blessing and prosperity on His people, in describing which the prophets use the noblest language, perhaps, in human literature. Where in literature do we find language so inspiring as in the seventy-second Psalm, in portions of the ninth, sixtieth, and sixty-sixth chapters of Isaiah, of the thirty-first chapter of Jeremiah, of the

fifth of Micah, and of the last of Amos? We see, then, that Jesus, in choosing for His great subject *the kingdom of God*, was placing His teaching in line, not only with the expectations of His hearers, but with the whole course of history and prophecy recorded in the Old Testament. In other words, He was making use of, and turning to account, the long preparation which God, as we believe, had made for that kingdom and for His coming. He was entering into His own.

But though the subject which Jesus chose was in the line of this long preparation, and was familiar in name and title to the Jews of His time, His teaching was not at all identical with the common expectation of the Jews. It was in a startling manner fresh and original, and the kingdom of God which He spoke of differed greatly from what they looked for. It had, we may say, three principal distinguishing features.

*His teaching was nevertheless new and original.*

*Three distinguishing features of it.*

1. Their hope was of material good things. No doubt the more pious Jews, like Zacharias (Luke i. 77), looked for a kingdom of righteousness and salvation, such as a true understanding of the prophets would have pointed to. But, in the general mind of the people, marvellous plenty, abundance of the good things of this life, vengeance on enemies, and political glory were the chief features of the kingdom of God which they were waiting for. The kingdom of God which Jesus preached was one, first of all, of spiritual good things, not meat and drink, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. In this respect the kingdom of God differs also from the various forms of socialistic aim and hope which are influencing large numbers in our day. The opening words of the Sermon on the Mount touch this critical difference between Jesus and the Jews of His time, and also between His Gospel and the wave of Socialist hope in the present day. Jew and Socialist alike assume that the key to blessedness is

*1. The kingdom is one of spiritual, not material good things.*

in the possession of plenty, and in circumstances that are advantageous. The average Socialist believes that with general plenty there would come general happiness, and an end of most moral evils. With Jesus, on the contrary, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke xii. 15). Blessedness lies not in what men *have*, but in what they *are*. It begins in character. And so, when "He opened his mouth" (Matt. v. 2), He said, "Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek. . . . Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness. . . . Blessed are the pure in heart. . . . Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God." This is the goal which Jesus has in view, a kingdom of God in which men are like God in character, are His true children, and share His own blessedness.

2. *It is to be brought in, not by earthly power, but by divine grace.*

2. Another great distinction in Jesus' teaching of the kingdom of God is in regard to the means by which it is to be brought in. The Socialist believes that the good time he looks for can be brought in by changes in law, government, and social arrangements. He would put an end, for example, to individual rights of property. Property—or capital, at least—would be held only in common; then all men would be labouring only for the common good, and by this one change we should have a practically new world. Besides this definite plan and scheme of Socialists, it has been the wont of many poets and philosophers, who have hoped for a golden age of the world, to assume that it will come by the natural, progressive powers of the human race. They have assumed that there is a law of progress in human history, working itself out naturally, and that in this way the long-hoped-for day of blessing will come. But Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John xviii. 36); it does not draw its resources from this world. The kingdom which

Jesus preached is something too high and too blessed to be set up by the ordinary means that men can use, or to come in the ordinary course of human progress. "The world will never *evolve* a golden age, or ideal state." As in the Book of Revelation the New Jerusalem, the Holy City, is seen coming down from God out of heaven, so it is with the kingdom of God which Jesus preached. It is something new, coming down from above; it is built up by supernatural power on a supernatural foundation. Therefore we speak of it as a kingdom of *grace*. This word is not used by Jesus Himself in speaking of it, but it is a true word in describing the kingdom of God which He announced; for that kingdom, as He expounded it, is a sphere in which not nature only is at work, but grace—a redeeming power from God which came by Jesus Himself.

3. A third distinction and mark of the kingdom of God preached by Jesus is that it is already present. Sometimes, indeed, He speaks of it as far off and to come in a latter day. "Ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God" (Luke xiii. 28). "I will not drink from henceforth of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come" (Luke xxii. 18).• But when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God cometh, He answered, "The kingdom of God cometh not with observation . . . for lo, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke xvii. 20, 21, *margin*). The truth is that, as the kingdom depends on *character*—on the character of true children of God—it had already begun when Jesus Himself was in the world, living as a Son with the Father. It grew as disciples gathered round Him, believed in Him, and learned of Him. It made a great advance when the Spirit was fully given—that Spirit by which men are inwardly changed, born into the kingdom (John iii. 3), and guided into all the truth (John xvi. 13). The kingdom is a

*3. It is already present, but is to come in future glorious perfection.*

kingdom of the truth (John xviii. 37), of which the "Word of God" is the seed (Luke viii. 11), and ~~as~~ it advances by dispensations and crises as men are able to receive the truth. Even the Old Testament dispensation was, in a sense, a first stage of it, and the Jews are spoken of as "the sons of the kingdom" (Matt. viii. 12). It reached a new stage when Jesus was teaching in the flesh. "From the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force" (Matt. xi. 12). Still another stage of the kingdom was reached when the Holy Ghost began to be given after Jesus ascended. So was given the divine power by which the kingdom grows and conquers. Another stage yet—the last which Jesus tells of—will be "When the Son of man shall come in his glory." Then the kingdom, as well as the King, will be revealed in glory. Outwardly and inwardly it will be glorious. "Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. xiii. 43).

*Attempts to  
define the  
kingdom of  
God.*

We may now attempt to give a definition of the kingdom of God. Jesus gives no definition of it Himself, and it is difficult for us to make one on account of the manifold meaning He gives the expression! Sometimes He speaks of the kingdom as consisting of *persons*, as in the words, "Suffer the little children to come unto me . . . for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark x. 14). Often He speaks of it as a *thing*—the supreme good (*summum bonum*) of human life; as in the words, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness" (Matt. vi. 33). "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32). Often again He speaks of it as a *sphere* or *realm* which men may be outside of, or may be within; as in these other words, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark x. 23). Yet, in spite of

difficulty, it seems necessary that we should try to answer the plain question, What is the kingdom of God spoken of in the Gospels? We may say, then, that it is (a) the name Jesus used for a good time coming among men—a golden age—which He came in the flesh to begin, comes in the Spirit to advance, and will come again in glory to perfect. Or (b) it is a sphere of life, higher than our natural sphere, into which men can be born anew (John iii. 3), and in which the Spirit works, imparting the life which is eternal. Or (c) it is a new society or commonwealth, which Jesus came to form, of men redeemed from sin, and in fellowship with God as His sons, in which He is to them, and they are to Him and to one another, all that they are capable of being. So the old promise is gloriously fulfilled, "I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people."

Who, it may be asked, is the king of this kingdom? Jesus is its King, for He says, "The Son of man shall . . . gather out of *his kingdom* all things that cause stumbling" (Matt. xiii. 41). But the Father is also its King; for Jesus teaches us to pray, "Our Father which art in heaven . . . Thy kingdom come" (Matt. vi. 9, 10). Jesus founds and administers the kingdom for His Father, and St. Paul tells us that the end cometh, "when he shall deliver up the kingdom to God, even the Father . . . that God may be all in all" (1 Cor. xv. 24, 28).

In reflecting now upon this great subject of Jesus' preaching, we see it to be wonderfully high, noble, and inspiring. It is so, because it is so grandly hopeful for the future of men. It brings into view a "regeneration" (Matt. xix. 28), or new-making of men, of society, and indeed of all things. Jesus sees, as none ever saw, the strength of the evils by which men are beset; yet still He preaches a kingdom with powers of divine grace at work in it so great that it shall prevail over sin, sorrow, and

*Who is its King?*

death in a glorious manner. His great subject is, as we said, not a soul's salvation, but that of a kingdom of souls. ~~X~~ is more than a man's own good, which, by itself, is not his highest blessing. It is a world-wide communion in good; it is "Joy in widest commonalty spread." "They shall come from the east and west, and from the north and south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God" (Luke xii. 29).

*Objection to  
the title  
"kingdom  
of God," and  
answer.*

It has been objected to the title of this great topic of Jesus that, though it was most suitable and attractive to His own time and nation, it is not so now. People nowadays are not, as the Jews were, expecting and talking about "the kingdom of God." We do not find "the kingdom of God" a prominent topic in the newspapers, and it is in them that we see reflected the strong interests of the people. It has even been suggested that a title like this, in which the word "kingdom" occurs, does not suit a democratic age like ours. The people of such an age are repelled, it is said, not attracted, by the word "kingdom." It conveys to them an oppressive sense of authority and obedience, instead of liberty and joy. Should we, then, in preaching the Gospel, use this title "the kingdom of God" but little? Should we gradually drop it as not quite fit for our time? Would Jesus Himself, had His preaching been in our time, have used "commonwealth" for "kingdom" (see Ephes. ii. 12)? Or would He have so adapted His teaching to hearers in this modern age as to have said, "The good time coming is at hand"?

But no title which leaves out God can truly express a state of blessing for men. And in the title "kingdom of God" His holy Name appears not merely because of His rule in the kingdom, but because of His gifts; not merely because His will is obeyed in it, but because His unbounded love and grace work in it and make it what it is,—a blessed fellowship of men with God and with one another. It is the kingdom of *the Father*.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE BASIS OF HIS TEACHING—GOD THE FATHER

HAVING found what is the great subject of the teaching of Jesus—namely, The Kingdom of God—we go on to inquire whether His teaching has any one fundamental truth, on which it rests. The teaching of Jesus is on a great variety of topics, and it is not connected together by argument or logical deduction. The truths He utters stand by themselves, and, without other support, find ready response in the true soul. But undoubtedly we do find such a single basis of all His teaching in His doctrine of God. On short reflection, we see that the character of the answers to be made to the greatest questions about ourselves and our destiny must depend ultimately on the doctrine we have of God. We possess life—this we know. But how have we it? Whence have we come? Why are we here? Whither are we going? What is “right” and our duty? And why do we feel the claim of duty so imperative? The answers to all these supreme questions are determined by the doctrine of God with which we start. Our doctrine may be that there is no God, or that man can know nothing of Him, or that He is personal and our Almighty Creator. But, whatever it be, in it will be found the root from which spring our beliefs on all the great subjects that chiefly concern us.

Looking, then, for the doctrine of Jesus concerning

*The doctrine  
of God  
fundamental.*



*Jesus' teaching expressed in one word, "The Father."*

God, one word expresses it in such a manner that it is immediately recognisable, and easily distinguished from the teaching of all other religions, viz. "The Father." In the teaching of Jesus that word was first uttered—so far as our records tell—at the well of Samaria. In the same sentence almost in which He said "God is a Spirit," He named God by this name, "The Father" (John iv. 21-24).

*This peculiarly His own.*

We have said that this doctrine is distinctive of Jesus and peculiarly His own. Confucius in China, and Buddha in India, did indeed teach, centuries before Jesus, many good rules of life and conduct; but they taught no doctrine of God. Both seem to have thought any knowledge of God quite beyond man's reach. It may be admitted that the ancient people of Hindostan, of the Vedic faith, looked up to the sky, from which came the blessings they valued most, and worshipped the "Heaven-Father." But they did not come near to the teaching of Jesus about God as a personal Father. They spoke only as we do when in poetry we use the expression "Mother Earth." Among the Greeks, again, we find in Plato's myths the title, "Father and Framer" of the Universe; but the doctrine of God is vague, and He is thought of as far removed from men. To the Jews it was given to attain the highest place among all ancient nations in divine knowledge. They worshipped the same personal and eternal God of whom Jesus taught. The holiness and righteousness of God are nobly expressed in their Scriptures; His tender pity also; and they attained sometimes to the thought of His being the Father of Israel as a nation, or of its theocratic King. We find such sayings as these in the Old Testament—"Israel is my son, my firstborn" (Ex. iv. 22). "When Israel was a child, then I loved him, and called my son out of Egypt" (Hos. xi. 1). "I will make him (i.e. David, or the Son of David) my firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth" (Psa. lxxxix. 27). But the sublime faith that God is the Father of individual

men, and of all men, was never reached in all the Old Testament.<sup>1</sup> One sufficient proof of the immense difference between the teaching of Jesus and the highest level of Old Testament devotion is the single fact that in St. Matthew's Gospel alone Jesus speaks of God as Father—"My Father," "Your Father," or "The Father"—more than forty times, while in the Book of Psalms—high, personal, and intimate as the devotion is—God is never once so addressed.

The debt we owe to Jesus for this doctrine of God is profound, and it may be well to detain our thoughts upon it here that we may form some right estimate of it. Not merely Jews and men of that generation were indebted to Him for what He taught of God, but every generation since, and not least our own. Two things we owe Him, both of great price—the first, a strong assurance that God is; the second, an assurance that He is "The Father."

*Two great debts we owe to Jesus.*

Vast multitudes of men and many nations have had very dim and uncertain thoughts about God. Even their best and highest have had great doubts of His existence, or painful doubts of His character, or sad errors and misbeliefs about Him. To good and righteous men it has

*We escape from uncertainty and error about God.*

<sup>1</sup> Some readers have thought this statement too strong, and have appealed especially to Malachi ii. 10 ("Have we not all one father? hath not one God created us?") as anticipating the New Testament doctrine of God as Father of all men. But when the context of these words is considered they are found to have a quite opposite significance. Only Israelites are meant by the prophet when he asks "Have we not all one father?" He is rebuking sin of one Israelite against another as sin against a brother, and marriage with a heathen woman as a profanation of the Lord's holiness, and it would have been fatal to his argument to have reckoned the heathen to be of one father with the Jew. No doubt all New Testament truth may be said to be found in the Old Testament in germ. St. Augustine's saying is true, "In Vetere Testamento Novum latet: in Novo Vetus patet" ("In the Old Testament the New lies hid: in the New the Old lies open"). So the two dispensations show themselves to be different stages of one progressive revelation, and faults or deficiencies can be borne with in the Old Testament in consideration of what it is working towards against the slow receptivity of men. —See Canon Mozley's notable lecture on "The End the Test of a Progressive Revelation."

always been painful not to be sure that the world is governed by a living, thinking Person. An awful and terrible world it would be if the stroke of death, and all the thousand woes of human life, came with no *reason*, but just by blind, unthinking chance. If human beings, so sensitive as they are, feeling so acutely and liable to so grievous suffering, were under the government of a dead, unthinking system which we call "Nature"—dead and cruel as the stone that falls from the mountain, blindly inflicting on men whatever its chance directs—what a tyranny that would be! "If I could not believe," said one, "that there is a thinking mind at the centre of things, life would be to me intolerable."

There has been, of course, in all ages and countries, some idea of God abiding in the minds of men, with a tendency to worship and religion; but good men everywhere have longed for *certainly*. They have longed to find God, and they have longed to find Him to be just and good and interested in men. They have sought Him, but have not been able assuredly to find Him. These words of Job (xxiii. 3, 8, 9) express the heart and mind of many like himself, in many lands, especially in times when the riddle of their own or the world's sorrow pressed upon them—

Oh that I knew where I might find Him,  
That I might come even to His seat! . . .  
Behold, I go forward, but He is not there;  
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him:  
On the left hand, when He doth work, but I cannot behold Him:  
He hideth Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him.

Now, if we in this day, we who read these pages, have an assured knowledge of God and know Him as a Father, how have we come to this? Is it by argument? Is it that in these latter days we have so perfected the arguments for the existence of God, and smoothed away the

difficulties which the world suggests as to His character? Hardly so. The arguments for God's existence have in deed great strength,<sup>1</sup> they outweigh, we think, those against it. But they do not suffice, when we lean upon them, to give us a steadfast assurance, they do not sustain us in communion with God. "Strange!" it has been well said,<sup>2</sup> "God is the most necessary of all beings, yet no argument for His existence has ever been constructed that was satisfying to every mind."

not by philo-  
sophic argu-  
ment

Is it, then, by science and its discoveries, of which we are so proud in our day, that we have come to assurance about God? No, indeed! To many minds, these discoveries increase the difficulty, they make the universe so vast and seem to put God so far away, with the enlargement of our knowledge, God seems to be more and more withdrawn from the world, and, as a matter of fact, many men, eminent in science, are not believers.

nor by sci-  
entific dis-  
covery

How, then, do we have that assurance of God and of His character which we have claimed? The answer is, by the Lord Jesus and by His teaching. To Him this age is indebted for that faith, which, with its profound comfort, might have died out or gone near to dying out,

but through  
Jesus

<sup>1</sup> Two examples of them may be given here both forcible, the second also beautiful —

Atheism truly he never could abide. To him as to all of us it was flatly inconceivable that intellect and moral emotion could have been put into him by an intellect that had none of its own. —Carlyle, *Frederick the Great, Chapter on Frederick's death*

"The universe is not an accidental cavity in which an accidental dust has been accidentally swept into heaps for the accidental evolution of the majestic spectacle of organic and inorganic being. That majestic spectacle is as plainly for the eye of reason as any diagram of mathematics. That majestic spectacle could have been constructed, was constructed, only in reason, for reason and by reason. From beyond Orion and the Pleiades, across the green hem of earth up to the imperial personality of man all, the furthest the dearest the dustiest is for fusion in the inviolable point of the single Ego which alone glorifies it. For the subject, and on the model of the subject, all is made. —Dr. Hutchison Stirling

<sup>2</sup> By Dr. Marcus Dods (quoted from memory)

in spite of all the enlightenment and knowledge of which in these days we boast. The light of science, but for the abiding power of Jesus and His teaching, might have been darkness as regards what is highest and best in men, namely their faith in God, and those elements in their character which depend on that faith. Now, as in days long past, the words of St. John are true: "No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him" (John i. 18).

*His knowledge of the Father passes to us by spiritual contagion.*

But how is it that we find the teaching of Jesus so effectual in this matter? How is it that He is able to sustain us in this great faith? He is able to do this and does it because He had in His bosom so perfect a knowledge of God, and so unique a sense of God as Father. Therefore He could convey it to us. He does not perhaps anywhere directly say that God is and is a Father. He assumes this—lives in it Himself; and there is something in our Lord's converse about His Father, and with His Father, that carries assurance to our hearts. When we hear Him say, "My Father worketh even until now, and I work"; "I am not alone, because the Father is with me"; "The Father knoweth me, and I know the Father"; "The things which I speak, even as the Father hath said unto me, so I speak"; "The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth" (John v. 17; xvi. 32; x. 15; xii. 50; v. 20). As we hear Him so speak, a hush comes over our souls. We feel that He is speaking of One whom He knows. And when we read of Jesus lifting up His eyes to heaven and praying, "Father!" "Holy Father!" "O righteous Father!" or of His saying, "Yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight," we cannot doubt there was One to whom He spoke.

If any should dare to say to us, "There was no one;

• Jesus spoke as the prophets of Baal did, who cried and there was no one to answer ; He may have been deceived as they were," we should put away the thought with pity for those who can entertain it. And when, as so often, He speaks to us of *our* heavenly Father, or when He says, "I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God" (John xx. 17), we come by spiritual contact with Him to have an assurance about God and about the character of God, as great as the truth of Jesus, as strong as the authority of which we are conscious in Him,--and this is sufficient as a stay for our life.

There is, indeed, a further assurance which we get in intercourse with God. After Jesus has quickened in us a dormant faculty or weakened instinct for the knowledge of God as our heavenly Father, we then come to have a direct knowledge of God by communion with Him. But whenever this childlike instinct is again weakened, and that direct knowledge grows faint within us, and we come to be in doubt of God, we can fall back on the perfect knowledge we find in Jesus, and by contact with Him, by habitually listening to His words, we can maintain a faith in God as the Father which will stand the utmost strain of our life.

The name "Father" is not indeed of itself sufficient to secure right thoughts of God. If this name is used without belief in Jesus, there is danger of God being misinterpreted. Men may call Him "Father" and understand the name as if it implied weak indulgence, or tolerance of sin, and a slack government of men and of the world. But it cannot be so understood from the lips of Jesus, who is Himself so holy, and who prays with such reverence, "*Holy Father!*" "*O righteous Father!*" The word "Father" has a sure meaning to us, when interpreted by the character of Jesus, His Son, who Himself says, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John xiv. 9).

*His character interprets God's Fatherhood.*

*His other  
teachings  
based on  
this.*

How truly this knowledge of God as the Father is the basis of Jesus' teaching, and how noble a superstructure of teaching it is fitted to bear, will readily appear. The Psalms express the faith and devotion of the Old Testament, and in them the characteristic title of God is "King." "My King, and my God" (Psa. v. 2). "The King of Glory" (Psa. xxiv. 10). "The Lord sitteth as king for ever" (Psa. xxix. 10). If God be thought of as King, the highest place that can be given to men is that of servants of God. So the great Law-giver is spoken of as "Moses, the servant of the Lord," and the title of Messiah in that highest Old Testament prophecy in the second half of Isaiah is, "The servant of the Lord." But, with belief in God as the Father, the calling of men to be sons of God becomes possible. The way is prepared for the joyful cry, "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John iii. 1).

The whole idea of the kingdom of God also is changed when it is thought of as the kingdom of the Father. Love becomes its great uniting bond rather than law, and the liberty of sons its characteristic feeling rather than the obedience of servants.

The Fatherhood of God, again, is the one sure basis of the brotherhood of men; and the hope of the inheritance of the sons of God springs from the same root.

On the doctrine of God's Fatherhood follows also, as a natural consequence, the wonderful teaching of Jesus in regard to God's providential care of us during this present life—a care down to the numbering of the very hairs of our head.

And this doctrine of God's Fatherhood is especially the root and basis of all that Jesus taught of grace and of redemption from sin. If God be King, we conclude that He will judge. If He be the righteous King, we conclude

that He will judge and reward justly But, if He be the Father, we are prepared to know that He will seek His lost child until He find him, and that when the child comes to Him with the cry, "Father, I have sinned," he will be received with the welcome so wonderfully imaged in the parable of the Prodigal Son, a parable which has been truly said to have of itself alone exercised more influence on mankind than all the philosophies

It has been said with truth, that in the first centuries of our era, when throughout the Roman world faith had decayed, and liberty and worthy aims of life had faded, Christianity restored hope to mankind. The age we live in owes to Jesus and His teaching a similar debt In this age we have seen pessimism advance its sad account of human life The question, "Is life worth living?" has seemed in some circles open to debate The loss of faith in God is a sufficient explanation If there were no God, this sadness would be fully justified To Jesus we owe it—to Him in whose earthly life, as in a glass, we see the image of the Father, and from whose words we catch the happy contagion of faith in the Father—to Him we owe it that hope grows instead of being quenched, that it animates thousands of souls, and that it inspires the onward march of the Church and of mankind

And what though earth and sea His glory do proclaim,  
Though on the stars I wait that great and dreadful Name,  
Yea—hear me, Son of Man—with tears my eyes are dim,  
I cannot read the word that calls me close to Him,  
I say it *after Thee*, with faltering voice and weak,  
"Father of Jesus Christ—this is the God I seek

*Anonymous*



## CHAPTER V

### HIS TEACHING ABOUT HIMSELF

*Jesus Himself the great problem.*

JESUS presented Himself as a problem to His countrymen, and after He had been manifested to them for a sufficient time, the testing questions He put to His disciples were these—"Who do men say that I am?" and, "Who say ye that I am?" On the answer to this latter question it depended whether Jesus would find material for the foundation of a church; and when Peter answered well, His Master accorded him solemn praise—"Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xvi. 16, 17). Still, in our time, Jesus is the great problem, and the unexhausted subject of human inquiry; still this question meets us and must be answered—"Who say ye that I am?" To pass this question by would be to confess indifference to the highest things. The most searching and the surest test of character is what we think of Jesus.

Brought up as we are in the Christian Church, and early taught its creeds, we cannot approach the subject without prepossessions. Nor can we forget the teachings about the person of Jesus given by His great apostles Paul and John. We have leant upon these, perhaps, in our life, and they have become precious elements of our faith. But in an age of questioning, when we are anxious

to make *sure* in regard to what we believe, there is great interest for us in the inquiry, What did Jesus teach about Himself? What was His own consciousness of Himself?

In one respect there was great reserve in His teaching about Himself. Not till near the end of His ministry did He openly avow Himself, or allow Himself to be declared the Messiah, the Christ. Often before, indeed, the consciousness of exceeding greatness showed itself in incidental sayings. In the Sermon on the Mount, He assumed that He would be the final judge of men—"Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out devils? . . . And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. vii. 22, 23). It was of Himself He said—"A greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. xii. 42). An immense claim on men's allegiance was implied in these other words of His—"If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 26). And how majestic these sayings—"I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," "I am the resurrection, and the life," "I am the way, and the truth, and the life." (John vi. 35; viii. 12; xi. 25; xiv. 6). But He long withheld from the Jews the plain announcement that He was the Christ. Obviously He did so because this title had been so tarnished and carnalised in their thoughts that He would have been quite misunderstood. Had He said to the Jews as frankly as to the woman of Samaria, "I am the Christ," He would have been taken to mean that He was an earthly King of an earthly kingdom such as they were looking for, and their rage of disappointment, speedily following, would have led to His death before He had had time to win true disciples by His life and teaching. It became necessary, therefore, for Jesus to present Him-

*Avowed Himself the Messiah, but not plainly at first.*

self for great part of His time among men, as it were, *incognito*. He was the Messiah long foretold and prepared for; He accepted the title privately, and also publicly in the end (see Matt. xvi. 16, 17; and xxvi. 63, 64); but He did not commonly or early use it.

*Spoke of Himself as "The Son of Man" or "The Son of God." Both titles practically new to hearers.*

Two names He used, the one with equal freedom in Judæa and Galilee, *The Son of Man*; the other mostly in His debates with the Jewish leaders at Jerusalem, *The Son of God*. Both of these were—so far as meeting the expectation of the Jews went—*incognito* titles. We must, in studying them, put aside the idea that Jesus took either of these names from the Old Testament and used it because it was an understood equivalent for the Messiah. Neither of them was such a title. That passage in Daniel (vii. 13), usually supposed to contain one of them, should be translated, not "like to the Son of Man," but "like unto a son of man," and it merely conveyed that the kingdom of the saints of the Most High was typified by a human figure, while the types of the former and lower kingdoms were bestial figures—a lion, a bear, a leopard. And again, although the Old Testament texts—"Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee" (Ps. ii. 7); "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2 Sam. vii. 14); and "I will make him my first-born" (Psa. lxxxix. 27)—were taken as Messianic, it was only in a vague, honorific, and comparatively distant sense that the Messiah was expected to be a son of God. That these two names were not recognised by the people as distinct Messianic titles is plain from the fact that, after Jesus had long and often spoken of Himself as the Son of Man, and the Son of God, they still asked, "Who is this Son of Man?" and said, "If thou be the Christ, tell us plainly."

From whence, then, came these two titles which Jesus applied to Himself? If they were not taken from the

Old Testament as prophetic synonyms for the Messiah, and were practically new to His hearers, whence came they? We answer, they came out of His own heart. They were the expression of His own consciousness of Himself.<sup>1</sup> Two things He felt and knew Himself in experience to be, the one of which brought Him into profound fellowship with men, while the other kept Him in intimate fellowship with God. Out of the former consciousness He called Himself "The Son of Man"; out of the latter, "The Son of God."

First let us study the title "The Son of Man"—that pathetic title, in the utterance of which we may almost perceive a thrill in the voice of Jesus. Two chief truths are conveyed by it, the *reality* of the humanity of Jesus ("Son of Man"), and the *uniqueness* of it ("The Son of Man"). "Son of Man" is a Hebraism which expresses the possession of true human nature, with its characteristic weakness and creaturely dependence, with its characteristic eminence in creation, also, and its characteristic glory on account of God's condescension to it. "When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him but little lower than God, and crownest him with glory and honour" (Ps. viii. 3-5). Jesus by taking the name "Son of Man" signified His sharing in this lot at once mean and high, of which Pascal said: "If you exalt man, I will abase him; if you abase him, I will exalt him." He expressed also by it His community of feeling with men, His sharing in human affections and interests, His true experience of human life, His liability to temptation,

"The Son of Man" implies that He was—  
(1) true man,

<sup>1</sup> The title "The Son of Man" does indeed occur for the Messiah in the book of Enoch, written in the century before our Lord; but this is a book which we cannot think of as either a source or a mould of our Lord's teaching.

His exposure like other men to hunger and thirst, suffering and death.

(\*) *ideal and representative man.*

But, besides all this, in naming Himself *The Son of Man*—of which the equivalent in English idiom is, shortly, *The Man*—He described Himself as the unique and ideal Man, the Man in whom humanity is summed up, and the "fulness of the race made visible," who is the Head and Representative, not of the Jews only, but of all nations of men, in whom both sexes, and all ranks, learned and unlearned, men of thought and men of action, find example and sympathy. This is a title by which Jesus de-judaizes Himself, as has been said, and places Himself in such relation to the whole race of men that their enemies are His enemies, their sorrows His, their burdens His. He is bound up with their destiny. And as the race is so summed up and represented in Him, He is, in St. Paul's language, the second Adam.

"*The Son of God*" implies that He was—  
(1) *a true Son of God, proved by His intimacy with the Father;*

Coming now to the other name and title used for Himself by Jesus, "*The Son of God*" (which we meet with most frequently in the Gospel of St. John, though not there alone), we find here again two chief things implied—the *reality* of His Sonship, and the *uniqueness* of it.

In the discourses or debates of Jesus with the leaders of the Jews at Jerusalem, what we find Him most frequently pressing on them is the reality and intimacy of His Sonship with God. These debates are profoundly interesting, beginning with that unsurpassed example of them in the fifth chapter. As we read them we are startled at first, for it seems as if Jesus were violating His own rule, not to "give that which is holy to the unclean, nor to cast pearls before swine. To men incredulous and hostile He discloses the secret ways of His intercourse with His Father, and the beauty of the love that expressed itself in that intercourse. After His first words, so surprising for the nearness to God which they

assume: "My Father worketh even until now, and I work," He goes on to tell of the absolute dependence of the Son on the Father, and the entire acceptance by the Son of the Father's will. We think it worthy of a true child to say, "I cannot but obey my father." This "cannot" is noble. It is in the same moral sphere as Luther's heroic, "Here I stand, I can do no other: so help me God!" Similarly Jesus says, "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing: for what things soever he doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner." "I can of myself do nothing." "I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me" (John v. 19, 30). "I spake not from myself; but the Father which sent me, he hath given me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak" (John xii. 49); "I am come in my Father's name" (John v. 43). Jesus represents Himself also as constantly, like a true Son, watching the Father's example, and open in ear to the Father's words, while the Father again in His love to the Son has no reserves with Him, and does not withhold from Him the greatest powers. "The Father loveth the Son, and sheweth him all things that himself doeth. and greater works than these will he shew him, that ye may marvel." "The Father hath given all judgement unto the Son; that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." "As the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself" (John v. 20, 23, 26).

What did Jesus intend by this openness to men so hostile? His chief purpose doubtless was to influence their convictions, that they might be saved (John v. 34), to prove Himself the Son by the most direct and convincing of all proofs, viz. that of laying open to them His actual and constant filial intercourse with God, in the beauty and perfect naturalness of it which could not

be feigned. The reality of it would be proved by its simple beauty. He allowed, as it were, ray after ray of His filial glory to shine forth upon them; and had they not been utterly blinded by prejudice they would have felt how truly from the heart Jesus spoke, and would have seen those rays of His glory to be so sweet and heavenly that their faith would have been won.

(2) *such a Son as no other is*  
(a) *in perfect nearness,*

The Sonship of Jesus is real; it is also *unique*. There is, indeed, in much that Jesus says about His intercourse with His Father, nothing different in *kind* from that sonship with God which is possible for us, and 'is familiar in the experience of all true children of God. But there is a manifest difference in degree. His intercourse with the Father is perfect, complete, and unmarred by sin. All that Jesus says or does He knows to be of God. "I do nothing of myself, but as the Father taught me, I speak these things" (John viii. 28). Jesus was conscious of no barrier, "no film of separation between Himself and the Being of all beings."<sup>1</sup> "He that sent me is with me; he hath not left me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to him" (John viii. 29). So Jesus calls Himself *the* Son of God, or *the* Son. He *is* the Son as no one else is, from the completeness with which His Sonship is realised and constantly lived out.

(b) *in eternal*

But another question is of profound interest to us. Does Jesus teach the uniqueness of His Sonship on other grounds? Does He make Himself not merely the *ideal* and *perfect* Son, but the *eternal* Son? Does He teach anywhere His pre-existence before coming into the world, or His eternity of being, or His equality with the Father?

It is unmistakable that He is the Son of God as no one else is among men, in perfection of communion, unbroken and complete, not marred by sin, never wanting in full response either on His part or on the Father's.

<sup>1</sup> Godet: *St. John*.

\* The terms in which this communion is described seem to require the doctrinal faith in which we have been brought up, that Jesus is of one essence with the Father, and one in eternal being with Him. But does Jesus anywhere say so much as this of Himself? In many passages He speaks so that nothing short of it seems implied. His pre-existence is surely involved in such sayings as this: “I came out from the Father, and am come into the world. again, I leave the world, and go unto the Father” (John xvi. 28). We may say with much certainty that it is implied in this\* “Glorify thou me . . . with the glory which I had with thee before the world was” (John xvii. 5)\* And, though the expression “I and the Father are one” (John x. 30) *may* be understood of a *moral* unity, and not expressly of a unity of *essence*—though this may with difficulty be so taken—in that other saying of Jesus, “Before Abraham was, I am” (John viii. 58), that timeless “I am” cannot, we think, be understood as expressing less than eternal being. The words were sacred to Jewish hearers as the name of the self-existent God revealed to Moses (Exodus iii. 14), and Jesus could not have spoken them to such hearers in a quite lower sense. Jesus accepted also that supreme confession of Thomas, in making which this last of the eleven disciples became the first—“My Lord and my God” (John xx. 28). Our faith, then, in Jesus as the Eternal Son of God may stay itself not only on the unique communion with God which we see Him enjoying, but on His own belief and claim and testimony.

It is not meant that there are no other grounds for this great faith. There is also the apostolic teaching to which reference was made in the beginning of this chapter. And perhaps if the faith of most Christian people were closely inquired into, it would be found to rest largely on their own experience. They have felt the change and



blessing which have reached them through communion with Jesus to be nothing short of divine. He has to them, as it has been expressed, "the value of God," and they cannot give Him any lower name than that of the Eternal Son. We have been concerned, however, in this chapter only with our Lord's teaching and with what it, by itself, conveys.

*Value to us  
of these  
titles—*

Let us end by taking account of the value to us of the truths about the person of Jesus, which we find contained in each of these three titles, The Son of God, The Son of Man, and The Christ.

*One assur-  
ing that God  
is love,*

1. The Eternal Sonship of Jesus is not a doctrine of merely intellectual interest. Who Jesus was—on this depends our thought of God, the most vital thought in our moral and spiritual life. If Jesus be the Eternal Son, then how grand an act of condescension was His being sent into the world! That God should have sent some exalted creature as His messenger, or have raised up a man of supreme goodness and gift, would indeed have been a token of His thought for men. But if He sent His Son, who was eternally with Him, He came in a true sense Himself. In Jesus we have God, as it were translated into human speech. Jesus is the express image of God, and in His suffering and death, if He be the only begotten Son, we feel that God gives Himself for us. He does the utmost that Love prompts, or is able to do. We have final assurance that the world in which we find ourselves is governed by Love, that Love is creation's final law. In spite of all sins, sorrows, and contrary appearances, the most perfect optimism of faith is vindicated. God's name, "The Father," is justified and sustained. Our creed may well begin with the words, "I believe in God the Father Almighty."

When once we have felt what the Eternal Sonship of Jesus implies, we cannot part with it. Without it God's

love seems to fall greatly below His power. His power, shown in the visible universe of sun and stars, needs some exhibition of His love equally infinite and impressive, if the balance of the glory of His character is to be maintained. This we find in the incarnation of the Eternal Son.

2. The title "The Son of Man" is of almost equal value to us. The reality of the manhood of Jesus, when first apprehended, has been as salvation to many, so great has been the impulse from finding Him so near us in kinship and experience. *another assuring of human sympathy of Jesus.* What comfort it has been to human souls to pray to One who can understand us so perfectly, because He lived and felt as we do! In temptation or suffering how sustaining has been the thought: "Jesus was tempted as I am"; "Jesus suffered as I suffer"; "Jesus learned obedience through the things which He suffered, even as I must now learn it." And as we think of the wealth of being now possessed by the Son of Man, and of the glory of His filial nearness to God, all human burdens seem lightened, and human hopes raised higher. The whole future of our race is brightened by the belief that the Son of Man belongs to the race, and is its Head and Representative.

3. The third title "The Christ" (or Anointed One) has also to us still, and not only to the Jews of His time, its particular value and significance. *The title "The Christ" showing Him to be the core and goal of history.* It assures us that Jesus is He toward whom the great religious history of the Old Testament, and indeed of the whole world, converged. The working of God in that history culminated in Him. And now, as His words abide, "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. xxviii. 18), we believe that the course of the world's history is directed towards, and will finally culminate in, His second coming.

## CHAPTER V<sup>A</sup> (*Supplementary*)

### HIS TEACHING ABOUT HIMSELF

*Was our  
Lord the  
eternal Son  
of God?  
Reasons for  
studying  
this further.*

IN this supplementary chapter we shall carry somewhat further the study of our Lord's teaching about Himself, especially in its bearing on the belief that He is the Eternal Son of God. This seems required both by the shortness of the treatment given to the subject in the preceding chapter and by the fact that this is a belief against which there is a considerable current in our day. There are not a few who truly reverence Jesus Christ, yet incline to welcome a less stupendous doctrine regarding Him than that of His Deity and Eternal Sonship. They are influenced in this direction partly by the "psychological climate" of our time, which is unfavourable to belief in supernatural persons or events occurring in the course of the world's history. They are influenced still more, perhaps, by the happy impulse which this generation has received from its fresh apprehension of the true manhood of Jesus. In many former generations the emphasis of faith was laid almost wholly on the Divinity of our Lord. His Godhead bulked so largely in Christian thought that room was hardly left for His manhood. So far did this tendency go, that one eminent Father of the ancient Church denied that our Lord's humanity was liable to sinless infirmities, such as pain in His body or

• fear in His soul. Hilary taught that when we read in the Gospels of Jesus hungering, or thirsting, or being wearied, He must have imposed these feelings on Himself by an act of will. In later generations, and especially in Churches of the Reformed faith, Christian belief has left this far behind, and now in our time—partly through Lives of Christ of great vividness and insight which have been widely read—the true manhood of our Lord has been recognised with so great joy that it is dwelt on in preference to His Divinity, and the tendency is to make this the one key to the understanding of all we read of Him. Many would make it the whole truth about His Person. They would explain His eminence above all other men by saying that He possessed somehow in a surprising manner the consciousness of that indwelling of God which belongs to the whole human race. Or they would accept the opinion expressed by Dr. Martineau—that we do not know the laws according to which spiritual genius appears, and if such a man as Isaiah has arisen, it is conceivable that there should arise such a man as Jesus of Nazareth. Others, again, following a well-known German school of thought (that of Ritschl), would go so far as to say of our Lord that He has “the value of God” to us in our religious experience, but they would forbid us to raise any further question about His essential being.

In order to give help to readers who encounter this tendency and feel the force of this current in literature and conversation, we shall here study somewhat further our Lord's teaching and self-disclosure, especially as it bears on three questions that are decisive in regard to the belief we have named —(1) the question of His sinlessness ; (2) the question of His pre-existence ; and (3) the question whether the ordinary attitude and assumptions of Jesus are in harmony with the doctrine of His being the Eternal Son.

*Three questions of decisive import.*

(3) Was our  
Lord sin-  
less?

(1) Was our Lord always and entirely without sin? Some make reply to this question that perfection could not be in man, and they venture to name what they think errors in the conduct of Jesus. Others say we cannot at this distance of time know Him well enough to answer—a position which allows them to deal with the subject as if He were not sinless. In treating of these opinions, we do not need to cumber our pages with a discussion of the attempts made to find faults in our Lord's conduct; they fail too miserably. We go at once to point out that, even at this distance, one character of conclusive significance is plainly seen to belong to all our Lord's utterances—an entire absence of any consciousness of sin—an entire absence of that note of penitence for sin which is characteristic of holy men. We know enough of our Lord to perceive with certainty this great difference between His holiness and all other human holiness. He teaches His disciples to pray, "Forgive us our debts"; but He does not join in this prayer Himself. His whole tone and attitude forbid us to imagine Him joining in it. He says, "If ye, being evil": not "if *we*, being evil." "Ye must be born again": not "*we* must." He never speaks of Himself as a sharer in the sin of the world. Now, of necessity, a man who is entirely wanting in the sense of sin must either be placed below all good men, as being blind of heart to his own faults, or he must be placed far above all good men. Who can hesitate between these alternatives in the case of Jesus? Who would dare to describe Him as blind of heart and therefore to be set lower than good men we have experience of? It is a principle in the moral life of men, which is established by all our experience that the better and holier a man is, the more keenly aware he will be of his own inward sin, and the more certain to suffer in self-reproach because of it. How separate, then, even from the best men must we place Jesus who, while terribly exposing

sin of the heart, pronouncing an immoral look to be sinful, and a secret thought of vain-glory to be fatal to righteousness, yet is able to say of Himself, "Which of you convicteth me of sin?" (John viii. 46). "The Father hath not left me alone; for I do always the things that are pleasing to him" (John viii. 29). Nothing is more characteristic of saintly men than the sigh of the contrite heart and the lament for evil deep within. This is entirely absent in Jesus. Holy He is, yet without a shadow of self-reproach. The saintliest men, when they "feel death's winnowing wings," are deeply humbled in the sense of having largely failed in their life. Jesus, on the contrary, in the near view of death, has no feeling of a duty neglected or of a thought that is amiss. "I glorified thee," He says, "on the earth, having accomplished the work which thou hast given me to do" (John xvii 4); "The prince of the world cometh: and he hath nothing in me" (John xiv. 30). "The conscience of Jesus," says Keim, "is the only conscience without a scar in the whole history of mankind." Both by what He says and by what is absent from His speech we perceive in Him a sublime and indeed awful exception to the rest of mankind. As Godet puts it, we prove the sinlessness of Jesus by two steps of argument, which can both be taken with certainty from the records we have: the first—He was by universal agreement a man of eminent goodness, none to be set above Him or equal to Him; the second—though He turned on His own soul the eye of saintly holiness, and judged Himself by the highest standard, He was conscious of no sin in Himself. Now already by this fact of the sinlessness of Jesus we are carried out of the company of those who incline to think of Him as not differing in kind from other men, and who would think of Him as a greater Isaiah occurring history. He is a moral miracle. No physical miracle transcends experience as does His purity. He is

supernatural, and a supernatural account must be given of His appearing in the world. Even though it were agreed to put aside as "mythical" the story of the virgin mother and the birth at Bethlehem, in which the Christian Church has so long taken pleasure, still a supernatural account must be found of the coming of Jesus into the world, which, before He came, had nothing in itself of grace and power capable of producing Him.

(2) *Did He exist before His earthly birth?*

(2) Passing next to the question of the pre-existence of Jesus, Wendt has given an interpretation of some of the sayings of our Lord, quoted in the preceding chapter of this book (p. 41), which, he says, makes it "unnecessary for us to find in them the thought of a pre-existence\* of Jesus in the possession of heavenly glory with God before the creation of the world." He says, "The glory which I had with thee before the world was" (John xvii. 5) may mean the glory which from the beginning was laid up and preserved in heaven for Jesus; and "Before Abraham was, I am" (John viii. 58) means no more than that Jesus was pre-determined and foreseen by God—that He and His earthly life existed from before Abraham's time in the thoughts, purposes, and promises of God. Wendt is of opinion that this is in harmony with a mode of speech prevalent in the New Testament, as when our Lord says to His disciples, "Great is your reward in heaven" (Matt. v. 12), a reward (he understands) laid up in heaven in God's purpose. Beyschlag had before given an interpretation of these sayings of our Lord similar to Wendt's, differing only in being more poetical and imaginative. According to it, Jesus means that He was eternally in the thought of God, as at once an image of Himself which God beheld, and an archetype of manhood to be realised in Jesus on earth. Beyschlag thought that, though it were so, Jesus could be spoken of by St. John as eternally "in the bosom of the Father." But even if such interpretations of the

words of our Lord which are in question could be accepted, both of these views imply that our Lord did not come into the world of His own will, or in free acceptance of His Father's will, or in any knowledge of His coming at all; and we should be obliged to understand in a sense much lower than they naturally convey such sayings of His as these, \*I came forth and am come from God" (John viii. 42); "I came out from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go unto the Father" (John xvi. 28). It is very difficult to take such words as meaning only a coming into the world like that of John the Baptist or any other man. Further, the view of Wendt—and of Beyschlag also, we think—is quite inconsistent with this other saying of Jesus, "What then if ye should behold the Son of man ascending where he was before?" (John vi. 62), which implies not only that the glory of Jesus was laid up before in heaven, but that He Himself had been personally there. Besides, Abraham also was in the thought and purpose of God from the beginning, and if Jesus, in saying "Before Abraham was, I am," claimed for Himself only that he existed in God's thought, He would have given no vindication of His superiority to Abraham, which is the main subject of His argument with the Jews.

It has indeed been said, that if Jesus had meant to declare His personal pre existence, He would have said, "Before Abraham was, I *was*." But "*I am*" is the proper expression to denote eternal existence. *I was* would have conveyed the idea of a temporal existence, though earlier than that of Abraham: in other words, the phrase would have suggested an Arian idea of the pre-existent state."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prof. A. B. Bruce, *Humiliation of Christ*, p. 231. The first great controversy in the Church regarding the Person of Christ was with the *Arians*, one of whose articles of belief about our Lord was this: "There was a time when he was not."



(3) *What rank is implied in His ordinary attitude and incidental expressions?*

(3) We have yet to consider the ordinary attitude of Jesus as it appears in the Gospels, and especially to consider what rank of being seems most naturally to fit many of His incidental expressions. Every reader of the Gospels is conscious of the unique authority with which Jesus speaks. This was what first struck men in listening to Him: they felt the difference between Him and their scribes. We see that His authority transcends in majesty that of the old prophets. "Thus saith the Lord" was the great claim of the prophets: for Jesus, it is enough to say, even when He is sweeping away Old Testament rules or observances, "Verily, I say unto you." Yet the extraordinary height from which Jesus speaks is apt to elude our notice, because He does not so much claim His place of astonishing pre-eminence over men as simply use it, counting that it must be yielded to Him, and, as we hear Him speak, we do yield it, hardly knowing how much we yield. "A greater than Jonah is here . . . a greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. xii. 41, 42). So He speaks in seriously weighing the responsibility of the generation that heard Him. But He says it, not as making a claim, but as bringing into view what is beyond dispute. In the same quite natural manner He speaks in the Sermon on the Mount as Judge of all mankind, and tells beforehand how He will decide in the world's final day. "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out devils, and by thy name do many mighty works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. vii. 22, 23). No part does Jesus take to Himself more assuredly throughout all the Gospels than that of omniscient Judge of men, and when we look into His words we find the place He assumes at the judgment really divine. "Depart from Me" is the word of doom, and this is plainly counted

equivalent to that separation from God which is the extremity of loss for a human soul. In the foreview He gives of judgment, the angels are spoken of as *His* angels. While in one place His words are "the Son of man . . . and all the angels with him" (Matt. xxv. 31), in another He says "The Son of man shall send forth his angels" (Matt. xiii. 41). In the same parable in which these last words occur His kingdom and the kingdom of the Father are one. In the parable of the wicked husbandman He separates Himself in rank, as the Son, from all the messengers of God who came before Him. Of the divine householder, He says, "He had yet one, a beloved son: he sent him last unto them, saying, They will reverence my son" (Mark xii. 6).

In harmony with all this He freely uses of Himself titles and expressions of the Old Testament, which were, in it, peculiarly the property of Jehovah. In Malachi, for example, it is written of Jehovah, "Behold, I send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me" (Mal. iii. 1). Jesus interprets this of John the Baptist preparing the way before Himself (Matt. xi. 10). In the Old Testament, Jehovah is again and again the Husband and Bridegroom of the Church. Jesus in word and parable calls Himself the Bridegroom (Mark ii. 19, 20; Matt. xxv. 1). In the Old Testament, Jehovah is the Shepherd of Israel: Jesus presents Himself as the Shepherd of the flock of God and calls the sheep "my sheep" (John x. 27). And no wonder, if He might say in prayer to His Father, "All things that are mine are thine, and thine are mine" (John xvii. 10).

He joins Himself with God in a way that suggests equality—"If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John xiv. 23). In the story of the woman that was a sinner taken with the parable of the two debtors (Luke vii. 36 ff.) He practically assumes that

sins are a debt owed to Himself. And in a memorable passage He sets the mystery of His own being on a level with that of God's. He seems indeed to make the latter a mystery more explicitly laid open than the former. "No one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him" (Matt. xi. 27).

"It is doubly surprising (says the author of *Ecce Homo*) to observe that these enormous pretensions were advanced by one whose special peculiarity, not only among his contemporaries but among the remarkable men that have appeared before and since, was an almost feminine tenderness and humanity. . . . So clear to him was his own dignity and infinite importance to the human race, as an objective fact with which his own opinion of himself had nothing to do, that in the same breath in which he asserts it in the most unmeasured language he alludes, apparently with entire unconsciousness, to his *humility*. 'Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for *I am meek and lowly of heart*.'"

The words of our Lord that have been quoted are not offered as *proofs* of His Deity, but rather as eminent instances of that divine majesty which pervades the utterances of Jesus in the Gospels, a majesty to which he was slow to give express dogmatic form, preferring that it should first be felt in experience and should then burst forth into confession, as when Peter said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt. xvi. 16); or when the Centurion said, "Truly this man was the Son of God" (Mark xv. 39). It will be seen also from the sayings quoted how untenable is the frequent assumption that such a doctrine of Jesus is suggested only by the fourth Gospel—the passages above given being taken equally from the first three Gospels. And there is no saying of our Lord in which He more distinctly places Himself on an equality with God than that in Matt. xi. 27,

"No one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son," a saying reported with slight variation in Luke x. 22. One word of Jesus is sometimes quoted as expressly teaching differently,— "The Father is greater than I" (John xiv. 28). But how much is already implied in its being necessary for Jesus to say this! And He might truly say, "The Father is greater than I," in speaking from His dependent earthly condition. Even the Eternal Son might so speak, in a true sense, of the Eternal Father, whom we believe to be, in the mystery of the Trinity, the one "Fountain of Deity."

There are, doubtless, great intellectual difficulties about this doctrine of our Lord's person, according to which He is both human and divine, both man and the Eternal Son of God. And some have declared that from the time when our knowledge of astronomy became heliocentric instead of geocentric, it became impossible to believe that so great a thing was done for the inhabitants of this little world as that God should become man. But the value of men to God is not to be estimated by the physical size of the planet which is the scene of human history.<sup>1</sup> On the Christian estimate of the value of men and the love of God, so great condescension ceases to be incredible; and even greater intellectual difficulties will not avail with believers in Jesus when weighed against His consciousness of Himself. What that consciousness implies few will doubt who allow themselves to feel the full weight of His words in all the four Gospels. Our conclusion is, that we may take in its very highest sense the saying of St. John, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" (John iii. 16); and we may join in the adoration of so many Christian centuries, "Thou art the King of glory, O Christ: Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father."

*Conclusion  
from our  
Lord's con-  
sciousness of  
Himself*

<sup>1</sup> See Pascal's impressive presentation of this and comment on it in Mozley's *Lectures on the Old Testament*, p. 229.

## CHAPTER VI

### HIS TEACHING ABOUT MAN

It may well seem strange to us that *man* is so difficult a subject of inquiry for man himself. Mysteries present themselves in our own nature which are very baffling to us. They have been subjects of discussion for the greatest minds since serious thought began, and still, in many cases, the questions that have been raised remain unsettled; no answers have been agreed upon.<sup>1</sup>

We turn, then, to Jesus, of whom it is said that "He knew what was in man," and in whose teaching we have a confidence that is absolute. We ask, What is the character of His teaching about man? Especially we ask, Is it bright or dark? High or mean? Hopeful or unhopeful?

1. *Bright side:*

*Worth of men taught by Jesus' words,*

1. The teaching of Jesus has this great and constant brightness, that it always conveys to us a surpassing sense of the value of men—of the worth, indeed, of every individual man. There readily occur to us words of His of great weight on this subject, and questions He asked bearing

<sup>1</sup> Pity our eagerness to know  
From whence we come and whither go:  
How stole into the world, and why,  
Sin, and her daughter, misery.

*Fragment of Euripides, translated by*

D'ARCY W. THOMSON.

on it, to which no answer was expected just because the truth implied was too great and evident for answer to be needed. "Fear not . . . ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matt. x. 31). "What shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? or what shall a man give in exchange for his life?" (Matt. xvi. 20). "How much then is a man of more value than a sheep!" (Matt. xii. 12).

That in the view of Jesus the least important human being is of great value, according to the divine and true reckoning, comes out in His frequent language of deep consideration for the poor, in His surprising words about children, and in the indignation with which He was moved when His disciples forbade the children to be brought to Him for His blessing. "Blessed are ye poor" (Luke vi. 20). "The poor have good tidings preached to them" (Matt. xi. 5). "Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me" (Matt. xviii. 5). "I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 10). "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of these my brethren, even these I do, ye did it unto me" (Matt. xxv. 40). Perhaps nowhere in His teaching is the value of one human soul in God's sight more strikingly conveyed than when he speaks the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son, and adds the words, "I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke xv. 10).

Besides express words of Jesus on this subject, there is even greater force in what He constantly implies. The weight of earnestness with which all His teaching is laden implies the preciousness of those He ministered to, and of all to whom His words would be carried. His earnestness would be without reason if the life of man were not eventful in its course, and most eventful in its issue. The deep

*by His deeds,* compassion also of Jesus for individual sufferers, and His gracious acts of healing, show the same estimate of their importance. But the very greatest indication of the value *and especially by His Incarnation itself.* Jesus saw in men is His presence in the world at all—His coming into it, and the errand on which He came. "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matt. xx. 28). That the Eternal Son of God should become man is an event so stupendous that it taxes to the utmost our powers of belief, and that it should have taken place for the sake of men is a testimony to their value in God's sight that is beyond all words. By the incarnation, as by nothing else, it is brought home to us "that, in the sight of God, the stability of the heavens is of less importance than the moral growth of a human spirit."<sup>1</sup>

*This worth rests on the Fatherhood of God.*

If we ask here what gives so great worth to manhood in the view of Jesus, the answer is that the foundation of this, as of all His teaching, is His doctrine of God. If God be "The Father," if the purpose of God in making men was that they should be His children, and if He has endowed them for so great a place in His universe, their value must be in a manner infinite. No limits can be set to the value of a man if he may be God's child, and may contribute to the beatitude of God by loving Him as a child. The meanest beggar, when thought of as capable of an immortal life in the fellowship of God, is clothed, to our vision of faith, with more than royal dignity.

*Contrast of non-Christian ideas and practice.*

We shall appreciate better the element in the teaching of Jesus with which we are now dealing if we put it in contrast with what the opponents of Christianity have believed. All forms of atheism carry with them a painful loss of value in human life. If, indeed, there be no God, man is a creature formed without love or thought, and destined soon to be nothing. He is (as some material-

<sup>1</sup> *The Foundations of Belief* (A. J. Balfour), p. 347.

ists have scornfully said) "a digestive tube." With the first great writer against Christianity—Celsus—the insignificance of man is a favourite theme. He scorns the Christian ideas of man's importance. And in our day the discoveries of astronomy, which show the earth to be so small a speck in the universe, and the whole duration of man upon it so small a segment of time—these, it is urged, make man too insignificant for the Christian doctrine of his redemption to be credible. Even a religion like Mohammedanism, which confesses a personal God but thinks of Him only as a Sovereign, not as a Father, weighs down the human soul with a sense of its insignificance under a God so remote and absolute. Christianity surpasses all other forms of belief in inspiring those who receive it with an elevating and strengthening sense of the infinite worth of their own being to themselves and to God. And in the actual world of affairs and the customary ways of nations we find, when we survey them, that everywhere respect for human life, concern for the good of men, interest in their happiness, and sympathy for their sufferings, rise in proportion to faith in Jesus and familiarity with His teaching. It is in Christian countries that hospitals for the sick, asylums for the insane, refuges for the tempted, homes for orphan children, and all the various energies of philanthropy originate and multiply. It is in Christian countries that the lead has been taken in the suppression of the slave trade, the abolition of slavery, the milder and more just punishment of criminals, and the endeavour to make punishment reformatory. In the one case of a pagan nation beginning to rise out of callous disregard of human suffering—the case of the Japanese—we find that, in organising bands of relief for the sick on both sides in war, they have unconsciously owned the teaching of Jesus to be the great spring of such merciful regard for the



maimed and suffering, by enrolling the helpers under the flag of the Red Cross.

2. Dark side:

2. Thus far, the teaching of Jesus about man is bright and hopeful. But now we come to His teaching about human sin, and this is undoubtedly dark.

*Sin in man  
is (1) of  
awful mag-  
nitude and  
guilt,*

(1) The whole tone of Jesus in speaking of the sin that is wrought among men shows that He reckoned it to be of *awful magnitude and guilt*. The judgment He foretells as awaiting sin is strict, not omitting to take account even of an idle word. It is also sternly severe, the punishment of one single sin which He names being solemnly declared by Him to be worse than for the man to have a great millstone hanged about his neck, and be cast into the depths of the sea. Nowhere do we get such an impression of the guilt and woe of sin as from the holy mind of Jesus, revealed in His life and teaching.

(2) *universal,*

(2) Jesus also speaks of sin as *universal* in men. He assumes this rather than declares it. He gives as His errand into the world of men, "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke xix. 10). And speaking to His own followers, including even the men whom He had chosen to be with Himself, He took their sin for granted. "If ye, being evil," He said,

(3) *original,*

(3) Further, sin, according to the teaching of Jesus, is *original* in men. Many endeavours have been made to take a lighter view of man's condition than this. In the last century the ideas of Rousseau had great currency—that men are born good, that left in a state of nature they would continue good, and that it is owing to outside influences, from corrupt civilisation and the artificial character of society, that they go astray and become evil. Almost nobody now would take such a view. The thought of our generation is far more serious about man's natural state than this. Certainly the view of Rousseau cannot be reconciled with the teaching of Jesus. "From

within," He says, "out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, covetings, wickednesses, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, railing, pride, foolishness: all these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man" (Mark vii. 21, 22). This is a terrible list, and there is no doubt that Jesus represents these as natural products of the human heart. They come "from within." They do not need to be brought from without by example or contagion. Every man born into the world has sin of himself. The teaching of Jesus implies, and the universal conscience, rightly appealed to, gives assent, that sin is original in man. No one who has learnt of Jesus would say, "Men are born good."

(4) Sin is so deep in us that we cannot of ourselves cast it out, or rise above it. For this we need something which is beyond our own power,—a new birth by the Spirit of God. "Ye must be born anew," said Jesus. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John iii. 6, 7). (4) too inward for himself to cast out.

So sad an account of man's sinful state has been made a reproach to the teaching of Jesus. But it has commended Christianity to many of the best and wisest men. A missionary of the Church of Scotland, much honoured in his life and still remembered,<sup>1</sup> owed the restoration of his faith in a time of great doubt specially to this feature of our Lord's teaching. As he read in the New Testament, the conviction came powerfully to him—"This book is true. I find here a true account of my heart." And to our great poet, Robert Browning, the first of arguments for Christianity was that it rejected the lie of men being born good.

I still, to suppose it true, for my part,

See reasons and reasons; this to begin—

'Tis the faith that launched, point-blank, her dart

At the head of a lie—taught *original sin*.

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<sup>1</sup> The Rev. William Macfarlane, M.A., of Darjeeling.

*Man not  
wholly evil.*

But, serious as is the teaching of Jesus about sin in man, we must not exaggerate it. He did not say that there is no good in man. Even that word of His which we quoted, "If ye, being evil," shows when we read its context that He did not reckon men wholly evil. He recognised that they had good affections, from the truth and warmth of which within their breasts they might rise to an apprehension of the affections of God Himself. "If ye, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt. vii. 11). He recognises here that they had a real community of character with God. Even in addressing publicans and sinners, or men still more remote in character from Himself—the Pharisees—Jesus took for granted that their moral nature could be appealed to, that their hearts might be rightly affected by such a story as that of the prodigal son, and that they were not without capacity to judge, of their own selves, what was right (Luke xii. 57).

Thus far it appears that the teaching of Jesus about man is in part bright, in part dark. Very bright, because of the great preciousness He sees in every man; very dark, because of the sin He sees—original, universal, and terrible in depth and prevalence. And though Jesus recognises the good that still is in man, He regards the sin as too deep and intimate for him to rid himself of it by his own effort.

*Are all men  
children of  
God?*

This double account of man is reflected in the differing answers given to the question, Are *all* men children of God, or only *some* men? This seems a simple question, about which the followers of Jesus, to whom His teaching is supreme and final, should be agreed. But it is not so. Some answer confidently, Yes; others as firmly, No. In order to decide we must clearly see what we mean by men being children of God. The first necessity in settling differ-

ences of opinion is to be agreed about the meaning of our words and phrases, or to see in what varying senses we use them.

Now when we describe men as "children of God," we may be thinking of their *faculties*, or we may be thinking of their *character*, or we may be thinking of their *privileges*. All men have faculties or capacities which constitute in them a likeness and kinship to God Himself. This dignity belongs to all men. We speak now, of course, of their spiritual part, the soul. Jesus (Matt. x. 28) recognises two parts in man, a material and a spiritual, of which the spiritual is the more important. In that spiritual part man has the faculty of *knowledge*, which, however small it be in comparison, is like God's own knowledge. So a great astronomer<sup>1</sup> spoke of himself in his scientific discoveries as "thinking God's thoughts after Him." Man has also *moral sense* and *moral affection*; he can know right from wrong, and is capable of loving the right—a truly God-like faculty. So a great philosopher<sup>2</sup> likens it, in sublimity, to the starry heavens above us. And one thing more man has which completes his endowment as a moral personality, akin in nature to God,—he has *freewill*. Without this he could not be a son of God. Without it he might obey God as an automaton, or as a slave; but to love and obey as a son he must be free. These faculties in men fit them to be children of God, and in the fact that God has so endowed them, we have assurance that His design is that they should be His children. So far all men are His children.

But if, when we speak of men as children of God, we are thinking of their character, or of privileges which they have which go with a certain character, if we mean the great privileges of children of God—a place in the heavenly Father's household, the special love He has to children who love Him, and the eternal inheritance which He has

In know-  
feeling, and  
freewill all  
akin to God;  
so all poten-  
tially and  
ideally His  
children.

In character  
and privi-  
leges other-  
wise; so not  
all really.

<sup>1</sup> Kepler.

<sup>2</sup> Kant.

prepared for His children—if these are what we think of, we cannot say that all men are children of God. Very many have forfeited them by turning away from God, and rebelling against Him. If we must call such men sons, they are lost sons. The name of son in any sense of privilege, inheritance, or assured hope does not belong to them. It belongs only to those who turn to God in that freewill which they received for this very end, that they might give to God the trust and obedience of sons. So, while Jesus speaks constantly of God as “The Father,” He is found to speak sometimes as if only some among men were God’s children: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.” “Love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you; that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven” (Matt. v. 9, 44, 45). We may say then, in accordance with the teaching of Jesus, that all men are *potentially* and *ideally* children of God; this is what they have capacity for, and are meant for by their Maker, and we may therefore call God “Father of all.” But not all men are children of God *really*, in standing, character, and royal heirship. In harmony with this St. John says, “As many as received him (Jesus), to them gave he the right to become children of God” (John i. 12); and St. Paul says, “As many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God” (Rom. viii. 14).

*Full  
seriousness  
of Jesus’  
teaching  
completed  
by his doc-  
trine of  
Satan.*

The seriousness of the teaching of Jesus about man and about sin does not come fully into view unless we take note that, in the Gospels, Jesus makes us aware of a kingdom of evil in the background of human life, with a personal ruler of that kingdom and servants under him. The reality of this personal Evil One and his “demons,” as they are called in the Gospels, is certainly a part of the teaching of Jesus. It stands out far more clearly in His discourses than in the Old Testament, as is evident

from the number and character of the names by which our Lord speaks of this hostile power—"Satan" (Matt. iv. 10; xii. 26; Mark iv. 15; Luke xxii. 31; John xiii. 27): "The evil one" (Matt. v. 37; vi. 13; xiii. 19, 38; John xvii. 15): "Beelzebub the prince of the devils" or demons (Matt. xii. 25, 27). Man is spoken of by Jesus as in mysterious contact, in those depths of his being from which his thoughts come, both with the kingdom of light and with a kingdom of darkness. He is open to suggestions and influences from God, to temptations from Satan. "Evil is . . . not merely a characteristic of humanity and of the moral atmosphere in which humanity moves, but a supernatural element affecting the world and man from the outside. Temptation is not merely a reality, addressing man's sense and soliciting his will, but it is a living Power, the representative of a kingdom hostile to the Divine."<sup>1</sup> There is, indeed, nothing in the teaching of Jesus like the Persian doctrine of the Wicked One having an equal share with the Good One in the making of man; and there is no countenance to the idea once so rife of matter being essentially evil, and the body of man the hopeless sphere of evil. Nor is the power of the wicked one put on the same level with that of God. By the finger of God Jesus casts out devils, and speaks of Himself as the stronger, who is to bind the strong (Satan) (Matt. xii. 29). But that the power of the tempter is very great is seen in the temptations of Jesus Himself, who "suffered, being tempted," and in the title He more than once gives to Satan, "The prince of this world" (John xii. 31; xiv. 30; xvi. 11), that is to say, the living head by whom human society, alienated from God, is swayed, and with whom it is in communion.

Altogether the view which Jesus gives of humanity is one in which tragedy and glory are mingled. Guided by *Tragedy and glory of man's state;*

<sup>1</sup> Tulloch, *Christian Doctrine of Sin*, p. 106.

Jesus, we think of man as great in capacity and nature, akin in these to God Himself, great also in the value set on him by God, and the design God has in making him; but hanging between heaven and hell, knowing good and responsive to it, while a power from hell—for such is sin—has a hold on his nature which he cannot shake off. He can hear God's voice, and he is open to suggestion and inspiration from God. But he is also open to suggestion from the head and source of evil, Satan. He has freewill; his freedom cannot be overborne by any force of the tempter; it is constantly implied that he need not sin unless he himself wills to do it. But in this freedom is involved the sadness that he can resist even the gracious Will of God in His Son Jesus. "Ye will not come to me, that ye may have life" (John v. 40). "How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. xxiii. 37). If man chooses rightly, he becomes, in the full and glorious sense, a child of God. If by choice and habit he yields himself to evil, he becomes a child of the devil. (John viii. 42, 44).

yet (1) all  
are redeem-  
able, and

But still the teaching of Jesus in regard to man leans not to pessimism and hopelessness, but to optimism and hope. This on account of two things: (1) His view of men implies that all are redeemable, capable of full deliverance from the guilt and power of sin. If he teaches that that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that men cannot fit themselves for the kingdom of God, He also teaches that they may be born of the Spirit. That solemn word, "Ye must be born anew," implies this joyful one, "Ye may be born anew"; and to what a height of perfection and glory men may be brought appears from these words of Jesus in communion with His Father—"The glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we are one; I in them, and thou in

me, that they may be perfected into one" (John xvii. 22, 23). (2) Jesus announces a redemption that is meant for all and sufficient for all. That it is meant for all is implied in His words, "Preach the gospel to the whole creation" (Mark xvi. 15). That it is sufficient for all is implied in the fact of Himself, the Redeemer, being the Eternal Son of God, and the Holy Spirit whom He sends being also divine. The scale of God's redemption—too great for belief by those who assume the insignificance of man—corresponds to the full greatness of the world's need; shows infinite grace grappling with the immensity of human sin, temptation, and suffering; justifies the joy of the mother when a child is born into the world (John xvi. 21), and makes hope prevail in our thoughts regarding man.

(2) redemption is sufficient for all



## CHAPTER VII

### HIS TEACHING OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

*I. He corrects and raises the ideas of His time—*

I. As a teacher of righteousness, Jesus did not need to begin at the very beginning. Wherever He had appeared in the world, though it had been among people far lower than the Jews, He would have found that they already had some ideas of right and wrong. The Jews, to whom He did come, and among whom He preached, had been long disciplined by God and taught by His prophets from Moses downwards. They had those Ten Commandments which we still use as heads of duty to God and man. They had many other rules of life and laws of worship which we can read in the Old Testament. And they had, besides, a great system of traditions about conduct, whose purpose was to fence round these divinely-given rules, and secure them against transgression. Jesus had this whole system to start from—a system partly of God and partly of man, in its nature partly permanent, partly temporary. His work, then, as a teacher of righteousness, in the time and country in which He appeared, was to correct and raise the ideas of righteousness which He found prevailing. He exhibits the true righteousness—that of the kingdom of God—largely by setting it in contrast with the righteousness taught and practised among the Jews of His day.

The correction He makes of that righteousness shows itself in two main directions—in the direction of *inwardness* and in the direction of *width*. As we listen to His teaching we perceive that the righteousness of the kingdom of God is not external, like that of the Jews, but inward or spiritual, not narrow like theirs, but wide.

I. We shall illustrate first this *inwardness*.

(1) (a) One element in the religion of the Jews which we nowadays have difficulty in appreciating was their *ceremonial righteousness*. We have to go to the East among Mohammedans or Hindoos to find parallels to it in our time. There we discover that it is against the religion of the Hindoo to eat cow's flesh, and that for a Brahmin the touch of a man of low caste—even his shadow falling on the Brahmin's food—is defiling. So among the Jews it was against the law to eat the flesh of swine, of hares, and of many other animals, and a man became religiously unclean if he touched a dead body, and in other physical ways. The Law of Moses so enjoined; we believe therefore that there was a divine purpose in it for the time then present. But there is a great danger which accompanies all ceremonial religion. Wherever ceremonial righteousness has a place in religion side by side with true moral righteousness, the former is apt to get the chief place. It is a far easier way of being religious than to do right and to be good. There is thus a tendency to emphasise the ceremonial and neglect the moral element in religion, and you come in time to the monstrous result of people who are very religious and at the same time utterly immoral. So it is now among Hindoos, many of whom have far more sense of sin in eating cow's flesh than in lying.

1. In the direction of inwardness:  
(1) illustrated from His dealing with (a) ceremonial,

The Jews of our Lord's time had much of this evil leaven, especially the Pharisees, their religious leaders. Extortion, excess, and cruel neglect of parents, were com-

patible in them with punctilious religious strictness (see Mark vii. 9-13; Matt. xxiii. 23-25).

Jesus did away at a single sweep with all this ceremonial righteousness. Even what had a place in the Law of Moses He abrogated. He did so with a plain appeal to the moral sense and common sense of His hearers. He called them to consider that meats could not defile a man morally, because they do not go into his *heart*, but into his belly; they do not reach his *spirit*, but only his body. So Jesus, in one word and appeal, "made all meats clean." He carried the thoughts of His hearers past this outward religion to what was truly moral, and to what was inward. He warned them of the great source of real defilement, the heart of man itself. "From within, out of the heart of men, evil thoughts proceed . . . these evil things proceed from within, and defile the man" (Mark vii. 21, 23).

There are indications that Jesus Himself conformed to the ceremonial law, as being a Jew and living under the Old Testament dispensation, but His teaching involved the freeing of His Church and kingdom from all ceremonial bonds.

(b) the Sabbath,

(b) A similar change He made in regard to rules for the observance of the Sabbath. Strict abstinence from labour on the Sabbath had come to be regarded among the Jews as a thing in itself pleasing to God; and this strictness was systematised by rules, many of which were foolish, as that a tailor might not carry his needle about his person on the Sabbath, because this would be bearing a burden, and a man might not wear on that day sandals weighted with nails. The Jewish teachers thus dealt with the Sabbath as if it were an end in itself, and as if man had been made for Sabbath-keeping, as he had been made for purity, truth, devotion to God, mercy, and other graces of character inherently noble. But Jesus taught

that "The sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath" (Mark ii. 27). Its observances were not ends in themselves, but means to an end—that end being man's true good in body and spirit. The whole system of Pharisaic rules thereby fell to the level of ceremonial, with no value in their punctilious observance. Jesus justified His disciples' neglect of them by the example of David, who disregarded the ceremonial rule against himself and his men eating the shewbread, which was only for the priests. In appealing to this, and in quoting the prophet's words, "I desire mercy and not sacrifice," Jesus showed the Law, fully understood, to be on His side, and that He was not destroying, but fulfilling it, and bringing out its latent ideal. The Sabbath being made for man, He claimed, as the Son of Man—the Head of humanity,—to be Lord of it, that is to say, to make His own use of it, and direct His Church in using it. He refused to be hindered from healing on that day, saying, "It is lawful to do good on the sabbath day" (Matt. xii. 12). The Christian conscience, accordingly, has been set free by Jesus from bondage to formal rules about the Sabbath; and in the use of this liberty Christian men and the Christian Church will lay upon themselves just such rule and ordering of the day as shall best turn to account this great means and opportunity for man's good.

(c) Regular fastings, on set days or at set seasons are <sup>(c) fastings,</sup> also treated by Jesus as of the nature of ceremonial, and as no part of the righteousness of His kingdom (see Mark ii. 18-22). Abstinence from food and from the pleasures of life He does anticipate as a natural consequence of religious sorrow, but He does not command it. It must be the expression of inward feeling. His disciples did not fast while they had the joy of His company, and in the report of a saying of His in our authorised version, "This kind can come forth by nothing, but by prayer *and*

*fasting*" (Mark ix. 29), the last two words are an interpolation. Fasting fixed for recurring day or season is inconsistent with His kingdom, because it may be contrary to inward truth.<sup>1</sup> "Can the sons of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? As long as they have the bridegroom with them, they cannot fast" (Mark ii. 19). In the Christian Church, which enjoys by His Spirit so much of the presence of the Bridegroom, fasting cannot have the place it had among the Jews. The Christian conscience has liberty here also, and the Christian man is free to fast or not to fast, to deny himself or to use what is pleasant in life, according as he is prompted by inward feeling and by experience of inward profit.

(a) *externals  
in worship;*

(d) The great principle of spirituality and inwardness which underlies the changes now mentioned has sublime expression, in regard to worship, in the word which Jesus spoke at the well of Samaria—"God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John iv. 24). "Such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers" (iv. 23). By this word Jesus taught that the acceptance

<sup>1</sup> The practice and experience of the Church of England in regard to Lent may seem to weigh somewhat against this exposition of our Lord's teaching as being against *fixed seasons* of fasting. We therefore give here the following quotation from a dignitary of that Church, the Ven. W. M. Sinclair, Archdeacon of London:—

"As far as our Lord's words (Matt. ix. 15) go, they point rather to individuals fasting by their own choice at seasons of sorrow special to themselves, than to frequent and fixed fasts with disciplinary or meritorious intention. This is precisely the view of the Church of England in her two official homilies on fasting. No mention is made of Lent, Fridays or Ember days. The taking away of the bridegroom is interpreted to mean 'When Almighty God smiteth us with affliction, and seemeth to leave us in the midst of a number of adversities.' The Church of England, influenced by the traditions of the past, and unwilling for the sake of those to whom they were dear, to break from them altogether, registers in her calendar the principal fasts of olden days, but more as a time for special spiritual culture than as a discipline. She allows all her members to treat such times as they will, according to the large and wide charter of St. Paul (Rom. xiv. 5, 6)."

of worship by the Father has no dependence on holy place or prescribed ceremony, or priestly mediation, or anything external to the inward truth of the worshipper—his true thought of God, and his sincerity in drawing near to Him.

(2) Another advance of great importance in inwardness of moral teaching has prominence in the Sermon on the Mount. In that "Manifesto of His kingdom" we find Jesus dealing with some of the great abiding moral rules of life of which the Ten Commandments are a summary,—with those particularly which we reckon as of the second table, containing our duty to men. And here, while the Jews thought only of these being obeyed in deed, Jesus required that they be obeyed in thought. So

(2) *True righteousness must be in thought as well as act;*

He carried righteousness inwards. He quoted the sixth commandment, and, whereas it forbade murder, the act, He forbade hatred, the thought. He quoted the seventh commandment, and, whereas it forbade adultery, He forbade the lustful look. He quoted the words, "Thou shalt not forswear thyself"—a form of the ninth commandment—and required in His kingdom that inward truthfulness of character which expresses itself, without need of oaths, in plain simplicity of speech. Passing on to almsgiving, prayer, and fasting, He made the one great test of their value to be their inward motive. If they were done to be seen of men, if the thoughts in them were not true to God, they were worthless.

(3) Yet another element of inwardness in the moral teaching of Jesus is too important to be left unnoticed. The righteousness of the kingdom of God which he preached was a *spontaneous and free righteousness*. No righteousness is up to the level of that kingdom if it be done from fear, or even if it be done only from a sense of duty. A man is not at the height of the righteousness which Jesus pointed to, and exemplified in Himself, unless he does what is right of his own liking, unless he does it

(3) *True righteousness must be spontaneous.*

because he himself chooses it and prefers it, and his affection goes with it. So inward is the righteousness of the kingdom, it cannot be overlaid upon a spirit different from it; it is the natural outgoing of a spirit that is good. "The good man out of his good treasure bringeth forth good things: and the evil man out of his evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt. xii. 35). "Make the tree good, and its fruit good" (Matt. xii. 33). "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" (Matt. vii. 16). So the ethical teaching of Jesus in St. Matthew is in organic unity with the mystical teaching in St. John. The Sermon on the Mount requires the new birth spoken of to Nicodemus, and the kingdom of God brought in by Jesus is the beginning of the time of which our poet Wordsworth rejoiced to think, when liking and duty will be one, when love and joy will of themselves be sufficient guides of conduct,—

Serene will be our days and bright,  
And happy will our nature be  
When love is an unerring light,  
And joy its own security.

2. In the direction of width:

(1) He requires positive service to men.

2. We shall illustrate next the advance Jesus made on the Jewish idea of righteousness by *widening* it.

(1) While the main idea of the Jews in regard to righteousness was of *not* doing evil and *not* transgressing the Law,—for the language of the Law usually was, "Thou shalt not"—the righteousness taught by Jesus, both in word and example, was one of active well-doing. His own life was wholly one of beneficence. He went about doing good. He said that He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many. In His farewell intercourse with His disciples He washed their feet—type of all humblest ministries—and then He said, "I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you"

(John xiii. 15). He made greatness in the new kingdom to be determined by service. "Whosoever would become great among you shall be your minister; and whosoever would be first among you shall be your servant" (Matt. xx. 27). The great sin, as foreshown in His vision of judgment, was the good that had been left undone—"Inasmuch as ye did it not," or the talent that had been hid useless in the napkin.

(2) Another widening and elevating principle of conduct is contained in His words, "What do ye more than others?" "If ye love them that love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the Gentiles the same?" (Matt. v. 46, 47). Jesus calls on His disciples not to be content with the customary ways that are approved in the world. They are to be pioneers of that moral advance which the world stands in need of in every department of life—in trade, in politics, in labour, in social intercourse. Especially the range of well-doing is not to be kept, as it was among Jews, within the bounds of sect or party. Nowhere was the narrowness of the Jew more conspicuous than in the limitations of his exclusive and sectarian patriotism. "Love thy neighbour" meant to him only that he should love some other Jew; but Jesus extended the word "neighbour" till it included the Samaritan, and the enemy (Luke x. 37). And when we take this principle, "What do ye more than others?" along with those most stimulating precepts which we dealt with as examples of paradox in our Lord's teaching (Matt. v. 39-42), we see that the morality He calls for is of the noble kind we describe as heroic. An element of heroism and magnanimity He expects even in the common life of His disciples, in their salutations, lendings, compliances, and forbearings.

(2) *Magnanimity in conduct, and*

(3) One other instance of widening. A whole class of



(3) gives  
their due  
place to the  
"feminine"  
virtues.

virtues first came into their due place in the teaching of Jesus, those which have been called the *feminine* virtues, the virtues of gentleness and patience. The stronger virtues—those of courage, truth, and rectitude—had long been held in honour, and had found among the Romans and other nations illustrious exemplars. But only since Jesus came and taught among men, by word and by example, have virtues of the gentler class been fully owned as virtues. Before His time they were often despised; now they are set highest. Patience under injury, forgiveness of enemies, charity of judgment, meekness and personal humility, pity and sympathy with the weak—these are now owned as the highest tokens of character and the most worthy of admiration. The thought of modern times differs radically here from that of ancient times. And the change dates from Jesus. There was, before Him, an old world of thought; since Him, a new world. He effected this partly by His *teaching*. Putting foremost this new feature of His righteousness, the great sermon began—"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"; "Blessed are the meek"; "Blessed are the merciful"; "Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness' sake." But still more by His *example* did Jesus change the ideal of righteousness, and widen the conception of it. He was Himself meek and lowly in heart. He was, above all else, the great, patient, loving Sufferer. His death on the Cross it is which has placed a gulf so wide between our modern ideal of what is good and admirable and the ancient ideal of it that we can never return back. Our modern life, our modern art, our modern social order, all feel the revolution which Jesus made by this great widening of the idea of righteousness.

II. He  
makes two  
still more  
fundamental  
changes,  
both of them  
by revealing  
"The  
Father":

II. But the change which Jesus made cannot be fully seen by reckoning up even those great corrections on the Jewish or Roman rules and ideas of His time. His work

in the teaching of righteousness was more fundamental still, and we shall set it forth under two heads: (1) He gave men a new ultimate standard of righteousness, and (2) He gave them a new motive for being righteous. He did these both at once in giving the new and higher idea of God which He expressed in the name of "Father."

(1) Let us first see how this is so in regard to the standard of righteousness. Our ultimate standard of right must be the character of God. With a new and higher thought of God, our sense of duty is also new and higher, for we know that it is God with whom we have to do; and the human conscience has this divine grandeur in it that it cannot excuse any man from aiming at the highest which he knows. So, from the time when Jesus spoke of God as "The Father," and showed the Father in the mirror of His own life as a Son, all the moral ideas of men began to be raised. This is the root of all the changes in the moral standard which we have already mentioned. From the moment God is known as "The Father" the duty of man is to be a true son of God—to trust Him as a son should, and be like Him morally as a son should. "That ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. v. 45): in these words Jesus gave His disciples the great Christian rule of life.

(1) A new ultimate standard of righteousness; the great Christian rule, that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven.

What does this rule imply? The best answer to this question is the life of Jesus Himself. He is the perfect example of the true son of God living in the world. He is the visible Christian ideal. His life and death, more even than His words, are the final Christian law of righteousness, answering the question how man is to be like, and live as a son of God. From this ideal we learn that the central requirements in our *duty toward God* are filial trust and filial obedience. The trust is illustrated by Jesus' own dependence on His Father (John xvi. 32; Matt. xxvi. 53), and encouraged by His many comfortable

*Jesus' own life the model.*

words about our heavenly Father's care (Matt. vi. 25-33; x. 19, 20, 28-31). The obedience is illustrated by Jesus' own filial zeal, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me" (John iv. 34); and by His filial resignation, "Yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight" (Matt. xi. 26); "The cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" (John xviii. 11). From the same ideal of Jesus' life, our duty to men may be summed up in one word, Love—not any soft sentiment of love, but love such as God's own, and such as Jesus manifested in giving Himself for men's redemption, in sympathy, ministry, self-denial, and the Cross. Jesus, in a sublime manner, filled the part of a son of God among men His brethren, and His course is the supreme example of true righteousness to all who believe in Him. In virtue of His life and words together He is the Light of the world (John viii. 12); and He so expects His followers to be like Himself, and to act for Him and for His Father, that He says to them, "Ye are the light of the world. . . . Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. v. 14, 16). "As the Father hath sent me, even so send I you" (John xx. 21).

(2) A new motive for righteousness.

(2) Let us now see how the revelation of God as "The Father" gives a new motive for righteousness, and how it is that while Christianity exhibits a far higher standard of what is right, it yet makes attainment more possible. If God is known as "The Father," bestowing His forgiveness on sinners, bestowing His love on the undeserving, blessing them with the rank and privileges of His own children, the impact of so great love and mercy on the soul inevitably calls forth a great answering love, which makes obedience to God a joy. To trust Him and to do the things which please Him become passions of the soul. All the former inducements to righteousness remain, such as a sense of

the claim and beauty and reward of righteousness, but there is added a heart won to the side of righteousness, the love of God being shed abroad in it by the Holy Spirit given to it. And not only does the impact of God's love draw forth an answering love to Himself, but a natural instinct requires us to pass on that love to our fellow-men. If we believe that God loves us, we cannot but feel moved to love and serve our brother. So the belief, which we owe to Jesus, of God the Father over all, acting as a moral magnet of infinite power, makes righteousness spontaneous; for by that belief, when it is received, love is compelled, and love is the fulfilling of the law, according to that summary of righteousness which Jesus gave in two Old Testament texts, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind," and "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Matt. xxii. 37, 39).

No teaching on righteousness equals that of Jesus. *His teaching unequalled,* The teaching of the Old Testament prophets and psalmists is indeed often very high. But often, also, it drops, as in tones of complaint, or of loss of trust in God, and in prayers for vengeance on enemies. Jesus' teaching moves constantly and calmly at an elevation reached by the prophets only at times. Still more does it surpass the best moral teaching among pagan nations, which often reaches high truths, but is always partial and unequal. And there is this other supremacy in the teaching of Jesus, that His ideal or standard of righteousness is not more unique than is the "Moral Dynamic," or motive power that He supplies, by which the standard becomes attainable.

His teaching on righteousness is, we also claim, a final *and final* teaching. It perfectly satisfies the conscience and aspiration of man, and will never need to be improved upon. As we read in the Sermon on the Mount, or in the fare-

well discourses in St. John, we feel that if men so lived in act and spirit, they would be in a perfect state; all the blessedness of right-doing would be theirs. For a higher ideal of righteousness than that of Jesus we should require to find a higher revelation of God than He has made, and a higher example than that of His own life and death.

*but poorly  
realised in  
the Church.*

But though the teaching of Jesus is final as an ideal of life, and though we have access in Him to motive power so adequate, it is a reason for great humiliation to the Christian Church that His ideal has been so slowly, and is even still so partially, realised in the Church itself and in the society which is influenced by the Church. The moral advances of Christian civilisation have been slow. Evils have been long tolerated which were ultimately seen to be unworthy of followers of Jesus. The Church is not, as it should be, a shining testimony to the possibility of purity in an impure world, single-mindedness in a selfish and vainglorious world, truth in a world of concealments, love in a world still so far from brotherly. And one of the best signs of the Christian Church at the present day is that it seems to be burdened with regret that the righteousness of Christ's kingdom is so little realised in the society of Christian countries even now. There is rising before Christian minds a vision of society penetrated and moved far more than at present by the love which comes of that sense of the Fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man, which we owe to Jesus.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE CONDITIONS OF ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM OF GOD

WE shall in this chapter apply ourselves to study what Jesus has taught in regard to the conditions of entrance into the kingdom of God—in other words, the terms of salvation for individual souls. We shall try to bring together His various answers to the questions, “What must I do to be saved?” “What shall I do that I may have eternal life?” and see what is their full result; for no one saying of His gives the whole truth: often, indeed, what He says in one place may seem to contradict what He says in another. Sometimes, for example, admission into the kingdom of God appears to be the easiest thing in the world; at other times nothing seems, from what He says, to be more difficult.

1. One thing stands out with plainness and certainty in our Lord's teaching, and our first step will be to set it down, namely, that the highest good, the kingdom of heaven, is a free gift of God. Salvation is of grace, that is to say, *gratis*.<sup>1</sup> This fact about it is in the strongest opposition to the idea of our Lord's contemporaries the Pharisees—an idea more or less congenial, perhaps, to every human breast—that salvation and eternal life are to be earned by righteous conduct, and that, in so far as

*1. The terms of entrance easy. Salvation is a free gift.*

<sup>1</sup> Compare Wickliffe's prayer, “Lord, save me *gratis* !”

they are gifts of God, they are bestowed first on the most righteous. Utterly opposed to this is the fundamental truth in Jesus' teaching, that the kingdom of God, with eternal life which is the central blessing of the kingdom, is of grace. Jesus says to His disciples, "Freely ye received, freely give" (Matt. x. 8); "It is your Father's good pleasure to *give* you the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32); "My sheep hear my voice . . . and I *give* unto them eternal life" (John x. 27, 28). The same truth Jesus sets forth with almost paradoxical emphasis in the parable of the labourers in the vineyard (Matt. xx.) With that method of concession to the ideas of His hearers which He often uses, He speaks as if some of these labourers did earn the penny (that is to say, eternal life) by working in the vineyard all the day. This is no more than His concession in another place to the idea of there being persons who need no repentance. Here He uses it to make more distinct, by contrast, the case of the others in the parable who worked only portions of the day, and yet received the penny. So, in the manner most effectual with His audience, He sets forth the truth that eternal life will be given to many who in the service of God have fallen greatly short of earning it, and that, so far as their own righteousness avails, the grace of God puts all on one level. This doctrine has its root in that which was the basis of all the teaching of Jesus--His knowledge of God as the Father. If God were simply King, we should expect Him to judge and reward men according to their work. The legal view of salvation would be justified. But as God is a Father, it is in harmony with His character to deal according to grace.

*The one qualification, readiness to receive it.*

Now, if the kingdom is of grace, the condition of entering it must be that we receive the gift. This, accordingly, is the chief among the qualifications for admission—a readiness to receive it without any proud thought of a

claim to it by righteousness, or any despairing thought of being excluded from it by unrighteousness. The spirit required is that of the little child—"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall in no wise enter therein" (Luke xviii. 17).

And what makes this readiness to receive? It is faith—faith in Jesus, faith that He came forth from God (John xvi. 30; xvii. 8), faith that His gospel of salvation is true, and His promises of the kingdom gloriously sufficient. So, as John Wesley preached, "Faith is the beginning of all good in thee, O man! First believe in Jesus." "This is the work of God," said Jesus Himself, "that ye believe on him whom he hath sent" (John vi. 29). But this faith is so sure to be followed by receiving the gift of God, that in the Gospels *believing and receiving* are spoken of as practically one, and to receive Jesus is the same as to receive eternal life; for He is the great source of that life. He is the living salvation. Some further proofs and instances may be given here in confirmation of the principle that the kingdom of God is of grace, and that the condition of entering it is not righteousness but faith to receive. Jesus spoke of it as expressly for sinners—"I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark ii. 17). Great sinners received it, and were filled with a joy and a personal love to Jesus which the ordinary world could not understand, as in the case of the "woman which was a sinner," to whom Jesus said, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace" (Luke vii. 36-50). No preference was given to those who had sinned least, as if they had the first right to be forgiven. Rather, in actual fact, the publicans and harlots went into the kingdom of God before the righteous men of the time (see Matt. xxi. 31). Our Lord told in memorable manner of one publican who entered the kingdom in uttering the prayer "God be

*Faith in Jesus gives this readiness, and so faith saves.*



merciful to me a sinner" (Luke xviii. 13), while a Pharisee who made his righteousness his claim was rejected. He ended the story with this, which seems to have been one of His often-repeated and favourite sayings—"Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; but he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." It is also a strong confirmation of the doctrine of salvation being a free gift that, in every new generation in which it has been preached and believed, this grace of God has been magnified in the changed lives of men of every variety of culture, condition, and nation.<sup>1</sup>

2. *The terms  
also difficult.*

2. Thus far the terms of admission into the kingdom of God seem to be the easiest possible. But there are many sayings of Jesus in which entering the kingdom is spoken of as difficult, and the terms as very hard. "Strive (He says) to enter in by the narrow door: for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able" (Luke xiii. 24). "Narrow is the gate, and straitened the way, that leadeth unto life, and few be they that find it" (Matt. vii. 14). "If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children . . . yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. Whosoever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 26, 27). "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark x. 25). These are stern words. No words could be used to make the terms of admission more hard. How are we to understand them?

<sup>1</sup> "I believe that the root of almost every schism and heresy from which the Christian Church has ever suffered, has been the effort of men to earn, rather than receive their salvation; and that the reason that preaching is so commonly neglected is, that it calls on men oftener to work for God, than to behold God working for them."—Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, ii. part iii. sec. i. chap. xv.

This is the truth they express. The act of receiving the salvation of God is accompanied inwardly by a great act of renunciation. A man who receives the great gift of grace is like one who is offered gold and precious stones, and must first, before he can receive them, empty his hands completely of rubbish and worthless things, or of bad and hurtful things, with which they are filled. The earthly good things we cling to are, in comparison with the things of the kingdom of God, such rubbish: the ~~things~~ <sup>things</sup> we cling to are worse: and yet to give them up and cast them from us is very hard. This great act of renunciation is described by Jesus in many ways and by many examples.

*Receiving salvation involves a great renunciation.*

*This described as*

(1) He calls it *repenting*. The beginning of His preaching was, "Repent ye, and believe in the gospel" (Mark i. 15). Repentance, in our ordinary speech, means sorrow for sin and ceasing from it. We cannot receive the gift of God and keep our sin. But when we inquire more deeply what is meant in the Gospels by repentance, we find that it is a complete *change of mind and turning to God*. The root of all sin is in departing from the living God, and to repent is to renounce our own will, and take the will of God as the guide and rule of our life. Nothing is harder at first than this, which a man feels to be, as it were, losing his own self, or parting from what made his life dear to him. It is *self-renunciation*. But Jesus says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. vii. 21). To accept the will of the Father, to will to do that will (see John vii. 17), is a first condition of entrance into a kingdom of which that will is the blessed law.

*(1) repentance,*

(2) Another example and test Jesus gave of the great renunciation, in words already quoted—"If any man

*(2) hating kindred and life,*

cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 26). How stern this is! How startling it must have been to the multitudes who were following Jesus in easy mood when He turned and said it to them! We know, of course, that it is one of our Lord's paradoxes, and is not meant in the letter. He Himself taught as a commandment of God, "Honour thy father and thy mother" (Mark vii. 9-13). He Himself cared affectionately for His mother even when He was on the Cross, and He strengthened greatly the bond between a man and his wife (Mark x. 5-9). Objection that has been taken to the Christian faith because of this saying of Jesus is singularly dull-witted. But we know that in these strong words—as in others, where He says, "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. x. 37)—He means that He Himself, who is the King of the kingdom of God, must be first in our affections; that, if we would enter the kingdom, no pain of alienation from our kindred, even those nearest to us, on account of it, must be allowed to hinder. There were great separations in those days on account of the faith of Christ—a man's foes were often those of his own household—and still there are often painful alienations because of Christ; but this hardness must be borne for the kingdom of God, and for Jesus who is the living salvation. "Yea, his own life also" a man must hate. The natural life must, in a true sense, be surrendered, if a man would obtain the eternal life, which is the natural life transfigured. So Jesus expresses the alternatives before us in this often-repeated paradox, "Whosoever would save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's shall save it" (Mark viii. 35. See Luke ix. 24).

(3) Another example Jesus gave as follows—"Who-<sup>(3) cross-bearing,</sup>soever doth not bear his own cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 27). How strong this language! As if it were now said, "Whosoever does not follow me to the scaffold, he cannot be mine." No consideration of ease, no prospect of humiliation or suffering must hinder from following Jesus.

(4) Another example still—"Whosoever he be of you that renounceth not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv. 33). "*Forsaketh* not all that he hath" is our ordinary translation, and many have understood it literally. Jesus, indeed, demanded it so of one young man who asked, What lack I yet? The answer was, "Go, sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, follow me" (Matt. xix. 21). This saying was the beginning of monasticism. In the third Christian century a rich young Egyptian heard it read one day in church, and, obeying it to the letter, became the first monk, known as St. Anthony. How are we to understand this demand of Jesus? It must mean some great thing; and yet, if the best Christians now are not wholly in error, it does not always mean what Anthony did, and what that young man was called by Jesus to do. This is what it means. The tie must be broken which a man makes in his natural life between himself and his goods. He must cease to be owner of them in his own reckoning, and become only steward. He must think of them as God's, and as to be spent, not according to his own will but the will of God. Now, this change from owner to steward, if true and complete, is felt to be a real renouncing of all that he hath. It is hard to do, often as hard for the poor man who renounces earthly hopes, as for the rich who renounces actual possessions. "We may follow the guidance of

Mammon beckoning from afar, with a trust as idolatrous as if we held his hand."<sup>1</sup>

The hardness of the terms of salvation and of entrance into the kingdom in this aspect of renunciation may be confirmed by many other sayings of Jesus. It was evidently the choice of His wisdom in dealing with men, that the full truth should be known by them. When a man offered himself and said, "I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest," Jesus warned him to expect utter poverty—"The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." When He called another to follow Him and the man said, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father,"—meaning, perhaps, to bear his father company till death—Jesus said, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but go thou and publish abroad the kingdom of God." When another said to Him, "I will follow thee, Lord, but first suffer me to bid farewell to them that are at my house,"—Jesus answered, "No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back (clinging, that is, in heart, to the things of the natural life), is fit for the kingdom of God" (Luke ix. 57-62). And in speaking of the rich young man, "It is easier," He said, "for a camel to go through a needle's eye, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God" (Mark x. 25).

There are, indeed, great compensations assured for the renunciation demanded by Jesus, compensations far outweighing those losses and separations. Salvation and eternal life are great offers, for which great things may well be given up. And Jesus says, with expressive emphasis of detail, "Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or lands, for my sake, and

<sup>1</sup> Bishop Chadwick's St. Mark.

for the gospel's sake, but he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life" (Mark x. 29, 30). Faith in Jesus whom God hath sent, that faith which our Lord declares to be the fundamental work of a Christian soul (John vi. 29)—faith which is the faculty of beholding what is unseen, and treating the promises of God as certain possessions—this might enable the man to make the great exchange and to accept the gift of eternal life, even at the cost which Jesus has in so many ways exemplified.

•But there is something to be learned about this from a saying of Jesus which we must not omit. In answer to His word about its being easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of heaven, His disciples said in astonishment and alarm, "Then who can be saved?" (Mark x. 26)—meaning who can, whether rich or poor? Jesus accepted their dilemma; their fear was well founded. "With men it is impossible," He said. He carried His estimate of the difficulty of entering the kingdom to the height of placing it beyond human power in any case, and He gave the only solution of this enigma of salvation by adding the words, "But . . . all things are possible with God." (Mark x. 27).

*Faith to make this renunciation is beyond power of men, and needs the power of God.*

From these words we learn that not only is eternal life a gift of God, free and unearned by man, but the power to renounce the things that hinder and to receive the gift needs the working of God also in the man. By himself alone man cannot raise his faith in Jesus, and in the gift of God through Him, to such power and vivid force as to be able to make the great exchange of the natural life for the eternal, the things of the world for the things promised by Jesus. Salvation is, we perceive, in the

*Salvation is  
therefore a  
divine  
mystery.*

teaching of Jesus, a divine mystery, whether it is regarded on the side of God or on the side of man. We cannot divide it into divine and human parts saying that the gift is God's, the receiving is man's; for even the receiving is impossible without God. And this mystery is not only in the teaching of Jesus; it is in the experience of his followers. If we take the evidence of those whose entrance into the kingdom of God has been most fully conscious, and is most vividly remembered, we shall find that while there was a human element in it, and they acted according to those words which call for the utmost energy of man in seeking salvation, "*Strive* to enter in" (Luke xiii. 24), "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and men of violence take it by force" (Matt. xi. 12), yet their actual entrance was accomplished only when, in the extremity of their own inability, they cast themselves upon God. It was not by strong resolution that they entered the kingdom, but by a surrender to God in which they looked for that which was impossible with men to be proved possible with Him.

*It requires  
a new birth.*

There remains one discourse of Jesus yet to be considered in regard to admission into the kingdom, a discourse which is usually felt to stand alone. The discourse of Jesus in the third chapter of St. John is alone in one respect, that only there in that Gospel is "the kingdom of God" so named. Why the title is so frequent in the first three Gospels and so rare in the fourth we may be unable to explain. But the thing which in this discourse has been counted very exceptional is the declaration of Jesus to Nicodemus, "Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the kingdom of God," and again, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John iii. 3, 5). Many have objected to this teaching in the fourth Gospel as mystical, supernatural, and inconsistent with the plainer teaching of the

first three. But from what we have already reached in our study of sayings taken from these, we may see that the place of divine mystery is no higher in the Gospel of St. John than in the others. Jesus does, indeed, in that Gospel require a new birth. He plainly teaches that the things of the kingdom of God are spiritual, and so different from the earthly good things for which Nicodemus and others hoped, that a divine change in the nature and affections is needed before a man can see those higher things—see them in their truth and beauty, and so love them as to be at home in the enjoyment of them. Without this change wrought by the Spirit of God, the things of the kingdom of God do not exist for a man as good things; he is unable to receive them and unable to renounce the things of the natural life. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh”; only “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit” (John iii. 6), only this can enter the kingdom of God. It is expressly declared to be a mystery. “The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit” (John iii. 8). But the mystery is in full harmony with what we have learned from the teaching of Jesus in the other Gospels. They, too, represent salvation as an enigma of which the only solution is *God*. In them, too, a man’s entrance into life is by the power of God, on whom he has cast himself, that He may work in him to will and to do.

We may now recall from the beginning what we have found in our endeavour to put together the many sayings of Jesus about admission into the kingdom of God and about its terms. First, admission is of grace, *gratis*. Salvation is a gift so free that sinners may have it, even “publicans and harlots”; it is expressly for sinners, and it requires only faith to receive it. But for this receiving,



we learn from the teaching of Jesus in all the Gospels, a mystery of divine working in us is needed. We read in St. Mark, "With men it is impossible, but not with God : for all things are possible with God" (Mark x. 27). We read in St. John, "Except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John iii. 5). The faith in Jesus, which moves us to receive Him and commit ourselves to Him, is too high a thing to be wholly of man.

Two observations may yet be made.

*Objection to  
mystery in  
salvation,  
and answer.*

1. This teaching has no need to fear objection on account of its mystery. The demand often made for religion without mystery is a very superficial one, and the attempt to meet it fails to satisfy. When salvation has been so explained as to be brought down to a natural human level without any mystery, it ceases to command the faith and reverence of men. They are inwardly conscious that they need a great and divine change ; and all who are partakers of the salvation of Christ attribute it to God that they have attained to this grace. "It was the good pleasure of God (says St. Paul), who separated me, even from my mother's womb, and called me through his grace, to reveal his Son in me" (Gal. i. 15, 16). A similar account Christian people still give of their standing in the kingdom of God. And every authentic record of a soul being brought into the kingdom is felt to be worthy of reverent attention, because God has been in it.

*The need of  
divine grace  
no bar to  
salvation.*

2. This doctrine of a mystery of divine grace in the salvation of a soul places no barrier in the way of any one's salvation, even though Jesus says expressly, "No man can come to me, except the Father which sent me draw him" (John vi 44). Salvation is not on this account in any degree less possible. We are only thrown thereby upon God, and this makes salvation certainly possible. It

is no bar to entering the kingdom that we must depend on God to bring us into it: for if there is one truth more sure than another from the revelation of Jesus regarding the Father it is, that in the salvation of any soul God may be depended on.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE BLESSINGS OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

THE whole ministry of Jesus, in gracious word and mighty deed, breathes an atmosphere of blessing for those who believe on Him and are admitted into the kingdom of God. We shall in this chapter try to distinguish and reckon up the blessings He promises.

*1. The great Gospel promise of blessedness belongs to a future and eternal life.*

1. First we perceive that the great hope announced by Jesus belongs to a future life and future world. In the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. vi. 1 ff.) a reward with the Father in heaven is spoken of as the great gain of true righteousness, the sadness of the case of hypocrites being that "they have received their reward"—that is to say, all the reward they will get is an earthly one, the praise of men. The kingdom of God, to be sought first as the supreme good—also spoken of as the hid treasure and the pearl of great price—is, in its main sense and full accomplishment, a thing of another life than this present. It is at the judgment day, when men are raised from the dead, that the Judge will say to the righteous, "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. xxv. 34. See also Mark ix. 47, 48). Accordingly, another name for this greatest good is "eternal life," which in the first three Gospels refers only to the future—"in the world to come eternal life" (Mark x. 30). "Lay not up for yourselves (says Jesus) treasures

upon the earth . . . but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. vi. 19, 20). And among the hopes with which He comforted His disciples when about to part from them this was the first, "In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you" (John xiv. 2).

This is a great change from the teaching of the Old Testament, in which, for the most part, the good things promised to the righteous are things of this present world. Jesus "abolished death, and brought life and incorruption to light," and having thus vastly widened the view and hope of men, He placed in the world beyond death the great experience of God's favour to the righteous. Instead of prosperity in this life being the sure portion of God's people, Jesus warns His disciples very plainly that they will suffer persecution, that the world will hate them; and He sometimes calls on them to rejoice in those persecutions as certain marks of fellowship with Himself. "If ye were of the world, the world would love its own: but because ye are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John xv. 19. See also John xv. 18 and Matt. x. 25). "In the world ye have tribulation" (John xvi. 33). In this language of Jesus about temporal prosperity there is some basis for the paradox of Lord Bacon, "Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament, adversity of the New."

*This contrasts with Old Testament teaching.*

2. Next we find that the blessings of the life to come are, in the view of Jesus, spiritual blessings. This is in strong contrast with the beliefs of the Jews of His time. They had attained to believe much more than their forefathers did in a life after this present. They had made such advance upon the faith of former days that they believed—the Sadducees excepted—in the resurrection of the just to a blessed life. But the blessings to which the righteous would be raised were, in their expectation,

*2. The blessedness promised is spiritual. This contrasts with the common expectation of the Jews of our Lord's time.*

simply temporal blessings—abundance of the good things of this life. The kingdom of God, in their view, was to bring a time of overflowing wealth, of miraculous plenty in corn and wine, and of extraordinary earthly splendour and happiness, which the just would be raised again to share. In Jesus' teaching the blessings of the life to come are *spiritual*. The great joy of that life He does, indeed, often present under the symbol of a feast, as in the parable of the great supper (Luke xiv. 15-24), and in that of the marriage-feast of the king's son (Matt. xxii. 1-14); and the great future woe He represents under the form of being excluded from the feast, and left outside in the dark. But it is most plain that when He speaks of reclining at table, and of eating and drinking in the future kingdom of God, He means the bliss of spiritual joy and of spiritual fellowship. It is such blessedness as the pure in heart have in seeing God (Matt. v. 8), as the true children of God have in being with Him in His house, and as they have in perfect fellowship with one another. When Jesus prays for His disciples before His death, the great thing He asks for them is that they may be with Him where He is, and may behold His glory; also "that the love wherewith thou lovedst me may be in them, and I in them" (John xvii. 24, 26). Such spiritual blessings are those which are called by Jesus "the true riches" in contrast to the wealth of this world, "the unrighteous mammon" (Luke xvi. 11). And, unlike the treasures of earth, neither moth nor rust doth consume them.

Thus far we find that the great promises of Jesus refer to the life to come, and are of a spiritual character. ■

3. *Present blessings of the kingdom of God:*

3. Are there, then, no blessings promised by Jesus for this present life? Do His promises belong entirely to the world to come? Has He foretold nothing for His followers while they are here but the persecutions of which He warned them? Does He, for this present time, bid

them only wait and hope, saying, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom"? Very far from this. Jesus represents His followers as much more blessed even here and now than men of the world. He does so, however, in full harmony with His great preference of spiritual blessings over temporal, in full harmony with His saying, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke xii. 15). His followers are so greatly blessed, because spiritual blessings can be enjoyed in large measure even in this life. For though we are here in the body, our spiritual part is by far the more important. It is in the heart that we are truly blest or unblest; and the kingdom of God begins here in the heart and soul.

(a) The first of the blessings of the kingdom received in this life is the forgiveness of sins. (a) *for forgiveness;* This had a great place in the teaching of Jesus. In one of His parables He likened it to the cancelling of a debt of ten thousand talents (Matt. xviii. 24, 27). In a most solemn hour He spoke of His blood as "shed for many unto remission of sins" (Matt. xxvi. 28). And when He had risen from the dead He announced as a divine purpose, to which the Scriptures bore witness, "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name unto all the nations" (Luke xxiv. 47). It is also plain from His teaching that forgiveness follows immediately on repentance. It is a grace of the very entrance into the kingdom of God. Often it was the happy experience of sinners who came to Jesus to hear Him say in their first hour of converse with Him, "Thy sins are forgiven," or "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace," or "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven" (Mark ii. 5; Luke vii. 47-50). And not only while He was on earth did Jesus speak this word, "Thy sins are forgiven." Even now when any man is visited by that sense of sin which came like a

lightning-flash into the heart of Isaiah at the vision of God (Isaiah vi.), and into the heart of the Psalmist at the thought that he had done evil in God's sight (Ps. li.), and the man who is so visited comes to Jesus truly believing in His power to forgive, He makes the same answer, and usually in such a manner that it is heard in the depths of the spirit. The truth of Jesus responds to truth in the heart that seeks Him. By the influence of His Spirit, using perhaps the instrumentality of His word or His sacraments, a deep and sweet persuasion is wrought in the penitent heart of forgiveness received, and His blood, shed (as He Himself said) for the remission of sins, is an abiding seal and assurance of this grace. No blessing can be felt greater than this, which is received in first entering the kingdom of God; for thereby the pain of self-condemnation is relieved, and the burden of God's condemnation taken quite away. The walls of separation between God and the soul are broken down, the man is brought to God as a child to a reconciled Father, and in this very beginning of salvation there is often an experience of joy as profound as any in its whole earthly course.

In the prayer which Jesus taught His disciples, evidently as a form and model of daily prayer, He bade them say, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matt. vi. 12). This does not imply that forgiveness is daily lost by the sins and imperfections to which human infirmity is liable, or that by these sins the once forgiven man is thrown daily back into the fear and terror of God's condemnation. Jesus said, "He that is bathed"—in other words, he that has received a great forgiveness like the washing of the whole body—"needeth not save to wash his feet"—that is, from daily partial defilements—"but is clean every whit" (John xiii. 10). The great forgiveness remains; the peace of it should be unbroken; and the daily prayer, "Forgive us our debts,"

serves simply the purpose of asking and receiving from the reconciled Father the forgiveness daily needed because of sinful infirmity. With the very acceptance of our service of each day there needs to be mingled forgiveness of its faults; and the sense of this forgiveness is kept fresh within us by such confession and prayer.

(b) A second great blessing of the kingdom of God is life. This is a divine gift much spoken of by Jesus in His discourses in St. John's Gospel. It has by no means the same meaning with that which we ordinarily call "life." Indeed those who have only the ordinary natural life of men are spoken of as dead in comparison with those who possess this life. These last are said to have "passed out of death into life" (John v. 24). The full name for this new life in St. John's Gospel is "eternal life" (v. 24), by which is still meant a gift that is bestowed now in this world, but one which is of an origin and quality above the natural and temporal life of man. To give this life Jesus declares to have been His great errand in coming into the world—"I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (x. 10). He declares Himself to be the source of it—"I am . . . the life" (xiv. 6). Whoever hears His word and believes in it, receives the gift—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth him that sent me, hath eternal life" (v. 24). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth hath eternal life" (vi. 47). The beginning of this life is in the new birth spoken of in the third chapter of St. John; and, though this is by the Spirit (iii. 5), Jesus is none the less the source of the life, having Himself received it from the Father in order that He might bestow it among men—"As the Father hath life in himself, even so gave he to the Son also to have life in himself" (v. 26); "Thou gavest him authority over all flesh, that whatsoever thou

(b) *life, of which Jesus is the source and support.*



hast given him, to them he should give eternal life" (xvii. 2). Jesus is not only the source but the support of this life, as He declares in the words, "I am the bread of life" (vi. 35); "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven" (vi. 51). He gives Himself for the life of the world specially in His death, and the promise is to those who feed upon Him thus sacrificed—"He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life; . . . for my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed" (vi. 54, 55).

*Mystery of  
this life.*

In this teaching about "life" there is, no doubt, great mystery. But as it is the fact that, with all our science, we can little explore the mystery of our natural life, which we received in coming into the world, we need not be surprised that the mystery of this divine life, which Jesus came from heaven to give, should surpass our knowledge. And what Jesus says of eating the bread that came down from heaven—eating His flesh and drinking His blood—may cease to be such a hard saying when we find, by putting together different utterances in the same discourse, that coming to Jesus, believing on Him, eating His flesh and drinking His blood, are all names for similar spiritual acts of faith in Jesus, and communion with Him for our salvation. Thus, while we read, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves" (John vi. 53), we also read, "This is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life" (vi. 40). "Crede et manducasti," said St. Augustine: "Believe, and thou hast eaten."

*Its meaning  
and value.*

The meaning and value of this blessing of the kingdom may be made clearer in the following manner. The story of the prodigal son (Luke xv.) is an image of man's return to God and his forgiveness. But if the son, after his return and after the first joy of his welcome home, found himself

without love to his father, without relish for his father's society, and without interest in his father's affairs; if his tastes and likings had been so degraded by his habit of life in the far country that he could not care for the way of life in his father's house, it is plain that, even though forgiven and welcomed and restored to the place of a son, he would be unblessed, miserable, and without strength to live the life of fellowship with his father. Not otherwise would it be with any man who had received the first-named blessing of the kingdom, forgiveness, and had been brought to the Father, if he were without the filial mind toward God, had not similar tastes, and lacked the moral strength to do the will of God. He would be miserable. His reconciliation to God would be a failure if he did not also receive the gift of the true son's heart toward God, with the nature and disposition to love Him, and to love what He loves. Now the gift of *life*—this divine and eternal life in the soul of man, of which Jesus is the one source, and which He gives more and more abundantly to those who believe in Him and seek to live by Him—is a spring and living source of those pure affections by which a man is raised above the world, truly dwells in the kingdom of God, is at home in that kingdom, and has the love toward God, the zeal for God's honour, and the strength in His service which befit a child of God, and which constitute his true happiness. No doubt a sense of reconciliation to God does of itself naturally stir great gratitude and earnest moral purpose; but when we think of the instability of our human nature, and how much our will has been weakened by yielding to sin, we shall value exceedingly this divine gift of life, in receiving which we have quickened in us the will to obey the Father as children, and are also endowed with power to do it, with moral strength, and with affinity of nature to the truth of God.

*The result of  
these two  
blessings  
great and  
eternal.*

These two blessings of the kingdom, forgiveness and life, already involve so much in their first bestowal that they can hardly be added to except by the life being given more abundantly. For by forgiveness we have God for our reconciled Father, and by the gift of divine life we receive the heart and affections of children of God. So we are made in a deep sense one with God, which, in itself and in its consequences, is the true and final blessedness of our being. And while the experience of this blessedness begins now, the "life" is "eternal" not only (as before said) in respect of its origin and quality, but also in respect of its duration. Being divine in its source, and of a quality above the natural life, the death of the body is unable to destroy it, and loses significance as a real death. The man who has it "shall never see death" (John viii. 51). It attains its goal and completion in the raising of the body itself to a new and undying life. The climax of the promise of life is in the word repeated again and again, "and I will raise him up at the last day" (John vi. 40, 44, 54). We have also this great saying of Jesus, "I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die" (John xi. 25).

*(c) Other  
blessings  
consequent  
on them.*

(c) Other great blessings which Jesus promised for this present life will occur to readers of the Gospels. It is needful only to name some of them shortly, because they are all implied in these two fundamental gifts, or consequent on them. They are consequent on our belonging to God by reconciliation as His children, or on our sharing the divine life.

There is the great blessing of *the Father's keeping*, which Jesus asks for His disciples with urgency, on account of their exposure in a hostile world—"Holy Father, keep them in thy name which thou hast given me"; "I pray not that thou shouldst take them from

the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one" (John xvii. 11, 15).

There is *the Father's sanctifying*, or, more exactly, His *consecrating* of the disciples of Jesus to their work for Him in the world, so that, renouncing self-gratification, they may be entirely devoted to it—"Sanctify them in the truth: thy word is truth. As thou didst send me into the world, even so sent I them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth" (John xvii. 17-19).

There is *the Father's discipline*, which comes through the word of Jesus, and, when more is needful, through affliction experienced in the natural life, and checking the carnal will. "My Father is the husbandman . . . every branch [in me] that beareth fruit, he cleanseth it, that it may bear more fruit" (John xv. 1, 2).

There is *the shepherd-care of Jesus*, who intimately knows His flock, guides each one of them, and will suffer none of them to perish—"He calleth his own sheep by name, and leadeth them out"; "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me; and I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, and no one shall snatch them out of my hand" (John x. 3, 27, 28).

There is *the fellowship with the Father and the Son* promised in the words, "If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John xiv. 23).

There is *the fellowship of believers* with one another for which Jesus prays, "that they may all be one" (John xvii. 21).

There is *the answering of all prayer offered in the name of Jesus*—that is to say, offered in the faith revealed by Jesus, and so truly prompted by the Spirit whom He sends that He Himself speaks in it, and we speak in His name—"I chose you . . . that whatsoever ye shall ask

of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John xv. 16. See also xiv. 13, 14; xvi. 23-26; Mark xi. 24).

There is the blessing that comes of being occupied, like Jesus, in the service of man—"He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto the Father" (John xiv. 12). "He himself said, It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts xx. 35).

Other great blessings, which may be regarded as all consequent on the gift and possession of divine life, are freedom, rest, peace, and full satisfaction of the heart's aspirations. Life and light are closely connected. It was so in the creation of men, as St. John says, "The life was the light of men" (i. 4). So from the divine life, which Jesus came from heaven to give, an inner light springs up. Whoever receives the life has also moral and spiritual light, which grows in clearness with the growth of the life. This light agrees and coincides with what Jesus calls "the truth," and of which He says, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John viii. 32). Sin keeps its dominion by deceit and fascination. When the truth is seen, the chains are broken. The follower of Jesus, accordingly, who receives "the light of life" (John viii. 12) has also freedom. Again, as the life which Jesus gives is divine and raises our nature into conscious harmony of will and affection with God, the yoke of obedience to the Father, which Jesus bore and invites us to take upon us, becomes, as He said it would be, an easy yoke (Matt. xi. 29, 30). All the burdens of life, being known as our heavenly Father's choice and appointment, are lightened. That all is well with us is assured beyond doubt or anxiety by the Son's revelation of the Father, and so these great promises of Jesus are fulfilled, "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest" (Matt. xi. 28). "Peace

I leave with you ; my peace I give unto you " (John xiv. 27). In a similar manner, as the nature of a true child of God finds its full satisfaction in His love and in His service, the gift of divine life implies the fulfilment of the promise, "He that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John vi. 35). "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink" (John vii. 37).

4. It will be observed that in our enumeration of blessings promised by Jesus no mention has yet been made of any of the good things of this earthly life. Does, then, our Lord make no promise in regard to these things? Does He even condemn them as not good, so that there is a merit in refusing them and living an ascetic life, mortifying the flesh as much as possible? We answer, He does not condemn them. He speaks of the sunshine and the rain from heaven as good gifts of God (Matt. v. 45). He speaks of food and raiment as bestowed by our heavenly Father, who knoweth that we have need of these things (Matt. vi. 26-32). He bids His disciples offer the prayer, "Give us this day our daily bread," and in regard to our temporal life we are assured of a providential care so minute that the very hairs of our head are numbered. But earthly gifts are never placed on the same level of value with spiritual. There cannot be the same certainty of promise about them, because they may be withheld in order that we may gain spiritually. Even in that promise (Mark xvi. 17, 18), "These signs shall follow them that believe . . . they shall take up serpents, and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall in no wise hurt them," the hurt that is assured against may or may not be bodily hurt; the promise will be kept if they are protected from hurt in their better part. The promise in regard to food and clothing, "Seek ye first his kingdom . . . and all these things shall be added unto

*4. Jesus' teaching in regard to earthly good things.*

you" (Matt. vi. 33), may, in general, be literally fulfilled. But nowhere are earthly riches promised as a reward of fidelity to Jesus. It is indeed true that Christian uprightness often leads directly to a man's promotion or wealth, and promotion and wealth so acquired are to be received as good gifts of God. But very often, also, Christian fidelity brings worldly loss; poverty, not riches, may be the higher testimony to that fidelity. We must read with circumspection that promise of Jesus, plain and absolute as it seems—"Verily I say unto you, There is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or mother, or father (or wife, Luke xviii. 29), or children, or lands, for my sake, and for the gospel's sake, but *he shall receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions*" (Mark x. 29, 30). We must read this with caution, remembering how often the meaning of Jesus is deeper than the surface. Certainly this promise does convey that to follow Him brings us to a greatly more blessed life even in this present time than theirs can be who live for the world, and that losses for Christ's sake will be splendidly compensated even here. But we shall not expect the promise to be fulfilled in the very letter. We count it profane that Mormons should argue in defence of polygamy by saying that Jesus here and in St. Luke promised "manifold more" to those who for the Gospel's sake forsook wife or children. And if we refuse to take this literally of fathers, mothers, or wives, need we take it literally of houses and lands? But the promise is kept in ways which are visible to faith. Dr. Arnold said of his long invalid sister that from her devout unselfishness she so enjoyed the interests of life and the beauty of the world that no one seemed to him so fully to "inherit the earth" as she did. Is not this a glimpse of how lands lost for Christ's sake may be recompensed a hundredfold

in this present time? When St. Paul speaks of the mother of Rufus having been a mother also to him (Rom. xvi. 13), do we not get a glimpse of how those who have lost friends or been alienated from kindred through their faithfulness to Christ have, in the welcome of Christian brethren and the blessings of Christian fellowship, found their lives enriched beyond all their loss? And when the same Apostle could think of so many in all the churches whom he knew as his children in the faith, was not this promise fulfilled to him of "children a hundredfold in this present time"? The most solitary man or woman ceases to be solitary who enters into that saying of Jesus, "Whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Matt. xii. 50). Our Lord's teaching fully justifies these words of St. Paul's old age and ripe experience, "Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life which now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. iv. 8). But the promise of the life which now is must not be understood of mere earthly gain or glory or pleasure, and the greatly blessed in this present time have been, for the most part, men and women who had little of these things and were not dependent on them, being rich in "the life which is life indeed" (1 Tim. vi. 19).

5. The Gospel has been assailed by some in our day on account of that feature of it with which we began this chapter, that the great hope and promise of Jesus is for the life to come. Preachers of the Gospel have been scornfully spoken of as men who preached about heaven when they should have been seeking the good of their fellow-men in this present life, which (it is said) is the only life of which we have any certainty. We might answer in the words of a French writer: "Wonderful gospel, which in preparing us for an unseen and eternal life, so greatly blesses us in this!" No influence has

*5. Two objections to His teaching of eternal reward, and answers to these.*



so advanced the good of men, even in this world, as Christianity. But we rather reply, How great a loss to men it would be if in this life only we had hope; if we had to go back to the idea of man's absolute mortality, which held the ground among Greeks and Romans at the time when the Gospel began to be preached to them! What could make up to men for all that consolation in life's sorrows and separations which has been drawn from the thought and hope of *Heaven* since Jesus came, Himself the "Divine Word," which the friend of Socrates longed for, to assure us of a life to come?<sup>1</sup> What heart-rendings have been healed, what sweet anticipations nourished, by that promise of Jesus, so gracious and distinct, in which the homeliness of heaven, its width and room, its fitness for our abiding, and the actual preparation in it for our renewed and unending life and for the fellowships of that life, are assured to us by His truth and by the contagion of His calm certainty—"In my Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John xiv. 2, 3).

Another assault on our Lord's teaching has been made on the ground that the hope of eternal reward which He gives makes men's virtue selfish, and so lowers it or destroys it as virtue. But, we answer, could we justify the government of the world if blessing did not follow upon righteousness? And does virtue remain itself, and praiseworthy, only in a universe the government of which is hostile to it or indifferent? We answer also that, since the blessings promised in the Gospel are spiritual, the reward which Jesus offers to goodness is primarily this unselfish one, the attainment of perfection in goodness itself.

<sup>1</sup> Plato, *Phædo*, xxxv.

## CHAPTER X

### HIS TEACHING ABOUT HIS OWN DEATH

THE death of Jesus is the event in His earthly history which has been cherished above all others in the memory of His Church. In the full narratives of all the four evangelists, in the writings of the apostles, in the preaching of missionaries, in the devout thought of Christian souls, nothing has received so great place or significance as the story of the Cross of Christ. If we were asked to name the power of the Gospel, by which it has won its way in the world, and by the loss of which it would be, as it were, disarmed, we should reply in one word, the Cross. *power of the Cross.*

In this chapter we are to inquire what Jesus Himself taught about His death, and, in particular, what meaning and significance He attributed to it. This inquiry has become the more necessary because some, who believe that Jesus manifested God's mercy to sinners, have ceased to believe that His death was an atonement for men's sins, and the ground of their forgiveness. Those who are of this opinion remind us that we are called upon to forgive a wrong done to us if the wrong-doer is penitent, although there be no atonement made for the wrong, and God (they urge), being infinitely more generous than we, will do no less Himself. They count an atonement unnecessary, and even derogatory to the grace of God. There is therefore *Present need to inquire what our Lord taught about His death.*

serious reason for inquiring what is the full teaching of Jesus on this subject—a subject which is of so great concern to all Christian people.

It is not meant that we must limit our belief about the death of Jesus to what He Himself taught during His earthly life. We cannot assume that this is all His mind about it, in face of His well-known words, "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth : for he shall not speak from himself ; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall he speak " (John xvi. 12, 13). These words justify the belief that what the apostles taught by the Spirit after Jesus had gone into heaven is, in a true sense, part of the teaching of Jesus. But it is of importance for us to assure ourselves that Jesus' own recorded teaching and that of the apostles are in harmony, and that the latter has unmistakable roots in the former.

On first examining with this view the pages of the Gospels we may be surprised to find Jesus speak so little about the efficacy of His death for our salvation. It has pained some, and almost shaken their confidence, to find that saving efficacy not nearly so frequent a subject in Jesus' own teaching as in the letters of His apostles. His own doctrine about His death seems much less full and explicit than theirs. But, on second thoughts, and when we compare Him with other great men, the remarkable thing rather is that He says so much of His death by anticipation, and attaches so much significance to it. It is not a usual thing for a great teacher to make his own death his subject ; and that Jesus should have done so is the more striking that His disciples could so little believe it, or bear to hear of it, before it happened (Matt. xvi. 22 ; Mark ix. 32). We believe there is enough, even in Jesus' own teaching before His death, to show that it had great

divine significance, to indicate the nature of that significance, and to assure us that the doctrine of the apostles is rooted in that of their Master.

I. The importance of the event in the thought of Jesus appears first from the shadow that it cast before on His whole ministry. Even early in His ministry we find serious reference to it, as if it was from the beginning the dark background of His prospect. It was early in His ministry that He referred to it in the words which follow : “Can the sons of the bride-chamber fast, while the bridegroom is with them? . . . But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them” (Mark ii. 19, 20). It was early in His ministry that He made enigmatic reference to it in the words, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up” (John ii. 19). It was early in His ministry that He said to Nicodemus, “As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up : that whosoever believeth may in him have eternal life” (John iii. 14, 15). Already, we see, the death of Jesus casts its shadow on His own spirit, and already He teaches that there is a divine necessity for it in God’s plan of His earthly course, and in God’s plan of salvation for men. When the crisis of His ministry in Galilee arrived, the same thoughts were implied in the emphatic words, “Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves” (John vi. 53). On the mount of transfiguration, when the inner glory of Jesus became an outwardly visible glory, and heavenly companions talked with Him, the subject of their converse was “his decease which he was about to accomplish at Jerusalem” (Luke ix. 31). From about this time the shadow of His death darkened upon Jesus in anticipation, and it became habitual with Him to tell His disciples that it must befall Him, and to prepare them for the sad details of it. “From that time

*Results of inquiry.  
1. The long shadow cast before by His death shows its high significance.*

began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and the third day be raised up" (Matt. xvi. 21). "He stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke ix. 51). Obviously He was under pressure of a great sense of duty in view of what He must suffer and would accomplish by His suffering. Once He was going before His disciples in the way, and with such purpose and emotion written on His countenance that "they were amazed; and they that followed were afraid" (Mark x. 32). Jesus took the twelve yet again and said, "Behold, we go up to Jerusalem; and the Son of man shall be delivered unto the chief priests and the scribes; and they shall condemn him to death, and shall deliver him unto the Gentiles: and they shall mock him, and shall spit upon him, and shall scourge him, and shall kill him; and after three days he shall rise again" (Mark x. 33, 34). Another saying of this time is, "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke xii. 50). We cannot doubt that here He means His death and the load He was feeling in the anticipation of it. These expressions thicken as the time advances, and drop from Him as at the feast at Bethany, "She hath anointed my body aforehand for the burying" (Mark xiv. 8). In the whole of the farewell scene and discourses recorded by St. John (in chapters xiii.-xvi.) His approaching "hour" forms the very atmosphere of the thought, solemnising all; but He Himself no longer feels what is impending as *shadow*, rather as *glory*. All struggle being over, and the issue being fully accepted, He thinks of it as virtually accomplished; and since "perfect self-sacrifice, even to death, issuing in the overthrow of death, is the truest glory," He cries, "Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (John xiii. 31). The shadow returns at

its very deepest in the garden of Gethsemane, and is again dispelled by the thrice-uttered prayer, "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. xxvi. 39).

This review is of itself enough to bear us out in the belief that, in the thought and teaching of Jesus Himself, His death was of the very highest significance. It was the goal of His life's effort. "For this cause," He says, "came I unto this hour" (John xii. 27). The actual significance of it may not be explicit in any of the words we have quoted, but they imply a meaning in it quite beyond that which belongs to death in the case of other men.<sup>1</sup> No other man could have spoken of his death as Jesus does, or given it that place in the aim and purpose of his life which He gives it. And in instituting the Lord's Supper as a feast in memory of Himself till He come again, and choosing that one event to be showed forth in it, Jesus gives His death an importance for us surpassing all else in His earthly course, even surpassing the marvel of His birth.

II. The place thus given to His death in the teaching of Jesus is so great that we cannot avoid asking what is the value and significance of it, and inquiring what indications He gives of that significance.

1. The very least that can be concluded from His teaching is that, in dying, He was a martyr in the cause of truth. All who in this evil world are faithful to truth in a high degree provoke hostility by their faithfulness, and suffer for it. Yet truth has this right and this claim on men, that they should be faithful to it even unto death. Thousands have been thus faithful. Jesus was; and this

11. According to His own indications of that significance He was, in His death—

1. A martyr in the cause of truth.

<sup>1</sup> "While the apostolic teaching is more explicit, the feeling in Jesus is more complex and deep."—Principal Fairbairn, *Expositor*, Oct. 1896.

is practically all the significance that many Unitarians see in His death. They explain His forethought about it, and His clear prophecies of it, as just what might be expected from a good and discerning man 'who saw the force of the evil currents of His time, knew the hatred that was in the breasts of the Jewish leaders, and was conscious of His own unyielding faithfulness. Certainly Jesus Himself does recognise His death as—like the deaths of the old prophets—that of a martyr to the truth. "It cannot be," He said in reference to Himself, "that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem" (Luke xiii. 33). But the pressure with which the forethought of His death often weighed upon Jesus, and the divine necessity implied in the "*must* suffer," "*must* be lifted up," do not seem to be accounted for, if He was only to be, as the prophets had been, a martyr to truth.

2. *A martyr in the cause of love.*

2. He was further, in His death, *a martyr in the cause of love.* It is a law of human life that no great service can be done by us to others except at cost to ourselves. We must deny ourselves, we must sacrifice our own pleasure or gain or glory, if we would be profitable in the world. Except we have love enough to give up what is precious to ourselves, we cannot do good; and the greatly fruitful lives have been those in which there was a long death to self. The world advances by this law of sacrifice. "There was never a country cleared for civilisation, and purified of its swamps and forests, but the first settlers paid the penalty of that which their successors enjoy. There never was a victory won, but the conquerors who took possession of the conquest passed over the bodies of the noblest slain, who died that they might win."<sup>1</sup> Now Jesus Himself saw His death in the light of this law that progress is to be won for men by the sacrifice of self. He so expounded it by an analogy from inanimate nature:

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Robertson, *Sermons*, I. (ix.)

"Except a grain of wheat fall into the earth and die it abideth by itself alone; but if it die, it beareth much fruit" (John xii. 24). In willing obedience to this law, which reigns both in the moral and in the natural world, He yielded Himself up. He was sustained and cheered by anticipating the "much fruit" of which through death He would be the seed. He taught also, and leant upon, the companion truth, that the path of self-sacrifice is that of truest personal gain to a moral being, as would assuredly be made manifest in the eternal world. Of all the sayings of Jesus, this alone is reported by each of the four evangelists—the paradox of self-sacrifice—"He that loveth his life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal" (John xii. 25. See also Matt. x. 39; xvi. 25; Mark viii. 35; Luke ix. 24; xvii. 33).

3. So far as we have yet traced the significance of the death of Jesus, it is not singular, but accords entirely with general laws of human experience and influence. His life and death constitute together the most splendid example of the power for good that resides in self-sacrifice. But there are expressions that dropped from Him during the time when His death was impending which indicate His own private thought about it, and give it such a meaning and value as make it quite transcend even the most truly self sacrificing deaths of other men.

(a) One of these sayings of Jesus is the following: *(a) Redeemer,*  
 "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many." (Matt. xx. 28). He had before said, "The Son of man came . . . to save that which was lost" (Luke xix. 10). Here He looks forward to doing this by *redemption*—by giving His own life in exchange for that of others. The actual words used by Jesus are literally, "A ransom instead of many." "Ransom" was an idea very familiar to those to whom



Jesus was speaking. That men should be liberated from slavery, or from under sentence of condemnation, on account of the payment of a sufficient ransom was a thing readily understood. And we cannot doubt that the slavery or condemnation from which the "many" needed to be delivered was that of sin, or that in Jesus' view His death would be the sufficient price of that redemption. The hearers of Jesus could not but understand the "ransom" according to the use of the same word in such a passage as Exodus xxx. 11-16, in which we read how for each soul, when numbered and recorded by name within the old covenant, a "ransom" was paid—"to make atonement for your souls." / Such a ransom Jesus expresses His purpose to pay in giving up His life. So He interprets that supreme act, which He declares to be of His own free will—"I lay down my life for the sheep. . . . No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself" (John x. 15, 18). Not without ground, then, in the teaching of Jesus Himself, have St. Paul and the other apostles written in terms of great assurance of "life redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. iii. 24), of our being "bought with a price" (1 Cor. vi. 20), and "redeemed . . . with precious blood . . . even the blood of Christ" (1 Pet. i. 18, 19). Not without ground in the teaching of Jesus does all Christendom speak of Him as "The Redeemer," and believe that by His death something has been done to liberate us from sin, which no martyrdoms of holy men are ever thought to effect.

(b) *Sin-offering and ground of human forgiveness.*

(b) Another saying of Jesus, still more explicit in regard to the value, power, and significance of His death, was uttered when He instituted the Lord's Supper. As He gave the cup to His disciples, He said: "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, even that which is poured out for you" (Luke xxii. 20). "This is my blood of the covenant, which is shed for many unto remission of sins"

(Matt. xxvi. 28). That Jesus should speak of a new covenant would be no strange thing to His disciples, familiar as they were with the promise in Jeremiah (xxxii. 31), that in days to come God would make a new covenant with His people. Nor would "blood of the covenant" surprise them, for the first covenant had been ratified by blood, as in Exodus (xxiv. 5-8), where the story of that covenant is told, we read that they offered burnt offerings, and the blood was sprinkled, half of it on the altar and half of it on the people. The disciples of Jesus would understand their receiving the cup to be in place of that sprinkling of blood on the people, by which their entrance into the first covenant had been signified. If, now, Jesus had said only, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood," we might have felt bound to interpret His death as a burnt offering (as in Exodus xxiv. 5); and this would have left us in doubt whether it had any propitiatory value, for burnt offerings in the Old Testament do not usually imply expiation, but express simply the offerer's consecration to God. But Jesus says more than "This cup is the new covenant in my blood"; He adds, "which is shed for many unto remission of sins." In these words He evidently declares His death to be a sin offering, and His blood to be an expiation of sin. He evidently regards the death in which He is about to offer Himself without spot to God as a sufficient ground on which God can, consistently with Himself and with eternal righteousness, bestow forgiveness on sinners. Here again, accordingly—by these words in which He interprets His death beforehand and links forgiveness to it—Jesus gives most certain ground for what His apostles teach with such emphasis and joy, of "redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses" (Eph. i. 7); of our "being now justified by his blood" (Rom. v. 9); of our being while enemies "reconciled to God through the death of his Son" (Rom.

v. 10) ; and of Jesus being "the propitiation for our sins ; and not for ours only, but also for the whole world" (1 John ii. 2).

*Confirmations, and answers to objection.*

This conclusion is in harmony with the general belief of Christian people from the beginning, that there is something very awful in sin ; that before sin can be forgiven there is something very awful to be got over (if we may so say) in God, and in the moral order of the universe which is centred in God's character ; and that the offering which Jesus made of Himself in death avails gloriously to meet this necessity. Such a conclusion is in harmony, also, with the great place which we have seen His death had in the thoughts of Jesus all through His ministry, and with His saying in regard to it, "For this cause came I unto this hour."

Can we now answer the objection to which we referred at the beginning of this chapter, that God might be expected to forgive sins, as we are called to forgive wrong done to us, without "atonement"? Two things are overlooked in this objection. First, God does far more in forgiving than we do. We put away our resentment, but we cannot clear from guilt. A woman wronged by her husband may on her death-bed forgive him freely all he has done, but his guilt is not thereby removed. He is still liable to judgment for wrong and failure in duty.<sup>1</sup> When God forgives any one, He also removes the guilt. The sinner is no longer liable to the punishment that awaits sin. Some who have perceived how great a thing this is have denied that it can be. They conclude from the order of nature that a man cannot be separated from his sin or the consequences of it. It is indeed a miracle of grace that this should happen ; and we need not wonder at something being first required, which we call "atonement." But from the teaching of Jesus we conclude both

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Dale, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 243.

that true forgiveness is possible, God removing our transgressions from us as far as the east is from the west, and that this cannot be done on the easy terms on which one sinner may put away resentment against another.

In the objection with which we are now dealing it is also overlooked that God, out of His infinite mercy, has *without atonement* dismissed His resentment against our sinful race; for it is He who sent His Son into the world, and so provided the atonement. All that the most forgiving among human souls can do without atonement He has done, and this besides, which is unspeakably more and greater. The propitiation of the Cross, while meeting a divine requirement, magnifies the forgiving love of God by which it was provided.

One confirmation of the belief that our Lord's offering of Himself is a propitiation for sins cannot be omitted—that of experience. This belief has been in all the Christian ages profoundly welcome to human souls when deeply conscious of sin, and such souls have attained by the blood of Jesus a present peace, a near access to God, and an enduring confidence in the divine mercy, which are attained through no other faith. This will be manifest to any who will study the Christian hymns that are of widest acceptance, and observe the peace and joy connected in them with the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, "in whose death our sins are dead."

## CHAPTER XI

### HIS TEACHING ABOUT THE HOLY SPIRIT

*Permanence and growth of the kingdom of Jesus*

THE great subject of the teaching of Jesus being the kingdom of God, and the great purpose of His coming being to set up the kingdom of God among men, let us hear some words of a great man in regard to His success. Napoleon Bonaparte is not one whom we would readily quote in matters of religion. But he set up a mighty kingdom among men, and the genius by which he accomplished this was probably as great as ever showed itself in the world. So the opinion we shall quote has undoubted value. "I search in vain in history," he said, "to find the like of Jesus Christ, or anything which can approach the Gospels. You speak of Cæsar, of Alexander, of their conquests, and of the enthusiasm which they enkindled in the hearts of their soldiers; but can you conceive of a dead man making conquests, with an army faithful and entirely devoted to his memory? My armies have forgotten me even while living, as the Carthaginian army forgot Hannibal. Such is our power! A single battle crushes us, and adversity scatters our friends. . . . Alexander, Cæsar, Charlemagne, and myself founded empires. But on what did we rest the creations of our genius? Upon force. Jesus Christ alone founded His empire upon love; and, at this hour, millions of men would die for Him."

This is a testimony to the reality, the growth, and the permanence, through ages and millenniums, of the kingdom of Christ, which recalls the words of the Psalmist—"Thy kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and thy dominion endureth throughout all generations."

Why has this characteristic of permanence belonged to the kingdom set up by Jesus? Great earthly kingdoms have been set up by powerful men, but in more or fewer generations they have crumbled; the power by which they were established was gone with the great men who founded them, and they had not enough of internal cohesion to endure. The course of the kingdom of Jesus has been quite different. It began with but a few; in the time of its Founder it was like a grain of mustard seed. But, as He intended and foretold, it has grown into a great tree, and it is still spreading forth its branches. What is the secret of this permanence and growth? The chief answer to this question is to be found in the fact that after Jesus had gone from this world, He sent another in His place. A great man may found a kingdom, but he cannot provide successors like himself. Jesus promised and sent "another Paraclete," an expression which implies that He was Himself a Paraclete, and that the other would supply His place. Nay, the other Paraclete would do more and better than supply His place. His disciples would find it a gain to lose Himself if thereby they had the other. "It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Paraclete will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you" (John xvi. 7, *margin*). Let us study what Jesus teaches about this Paraclete, His successor and substitute, whom He calls also "The Spirit of truth" and "The Holy Spirit."

*due to His sending "another Paraclete."*

1. From the teaching of Jesus we can have no doubt that the other Paraclete is a *person*. Again and again Jesus speaks in this fashion—"He shall teach you all

*1. This Paraclete (imperfectly named Comforter) is a Person.*

things"; "*He* shall glorify me." And personality is implied in the title "Paraclete," which in our Authorised Version is imperfectly translated "Comforter." The word means "one who is called upon to stand by us, especially in difficulty or conflict." It is, accordingly, the word for an advocate, and is so used of Jesus Himself in 1 John ii. 1, where it is said—"We have a Paraclete (advocate) with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous." But as the word means "one who in any circumstances by his presence makes strong,"<sup>1</sup> it may be translated also Helper, Cheerer, Encourager. It designates one who by his companionship supports in duty, as well as comforts in sorrow. And on account of the emphasis with which Jesus represents Him as taking part with the disciples against a world in its very nature hostile, it may well be translated also Succourer or Champion. In the foreview of the hostility of the world which Jesus gives so distinctly in John xv. 18-xvi. 11, and of the conflict and witness against the world which His disciples would have to maintain, the Paraclete appears as a Champion whose intervention in the conflict would be decisive. "When the Paraclete is come . . . he shall bear witness of me." "And he, when he is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgement: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold me no more; of judgement, because the prince of this world hath been judged" (John xvi. 8-11). The intervention of the Paraclete is "robust and energetic,"<sup>2</sup> even more than soothing or comforting.

*He is a divine Person.* It is implied also in the teaching of Jesus that the other Paraclete is a *divine* person. Jesus could not well say that it was expedient for Himself to go away, if His substitute were less than divine. Nor could He have

<sup>1</sup> Dr. McLaren, *The Holy of Holies*, p. 83.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Dale, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 130.

taught that "whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him; but whosoever shall speak against the Holy Spirit, it shall not be forgiven him, neither in this world, nor in that which is to come" (Matt. xii. 32). Nor again could He have joined "the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost," as He has done in the formula of baptism (Matt. xxviii. 19), if all three were not divine.

2. Another great feature of this Paraclete whom Jesus promised to send is that He is a *Teacher*, a heavenly Teacher. The truth is His great instrument of succour to the disciples of Jesus, and so He is again and again called "The Spirit of truth." And how do we reconcile this with the claim of Jesus—"I am the truth," "I am the light of the world"? Jesus, we understand, is the great Revealer of God, and of the truth of God which is needful for man's salvation. How, then, can there be another Revealer? Why should Jesus say of this other, "He shall teach you all things"? The answer is, that this heavenly Teacher does His work *in us*—"He abideth with you, and shall be in you." His part is to teach inwardly. All the truth He uses is already presented in Jesus,—in His life, His work, His death, and His person. But we greatly need an inward power to behold the truth. We lack that holiness without which there is no divine vision. And this Spirit of Truth, who is also the Holy Spirit, purifies our hearts, rights our wills, corrects our purposes, and removes the veils of sin which dim our spiritual vision. The truth that was outward to us, but which we had not the power to apprehend, He gives us inward possession of. He clears our spiritual sight, so that we see what we could not have seen before; and when from the Scriptures, or any other source, the truth of Christ is brought to us, we know it to be true, as a man whose vision has been cleared knows the light.

*2 He is a Teacher of the truth, and gives inward certainty in regard to it*



Uncertainty about the truth in the things of God and salvation is a great pain to many souls who feel unable of themselves to attain to certainty. Must they, then, go to an earthly authority? No earthly authority can do more than present truth outwardly. It may be able to commend the truth to our acceptance by the respect we have for its character, and the experience we have already had of its wisdom; but still the truth it presents remains outside of us. Even Jesus Himself, though all He said was with absolute authority, recognised the need of His disciples for an inward teacher. This inward Teacher brings no new truth of His own, but He gives the capacity more and more to apprehend the truth that is in Jesus. What was forgotten He brings to remembrance; what was given in germ He carries forward fully to its issues. Through Him the great Revealer continues to enlighten the Christian mind—"He shall teach you all things," said Jesus, "and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you" (John xiv. 26). "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall guide you into all the truth" (John xvi. 12, 13). When Jesus avowed Himself a King to Pilate, He indicated that His kingdom was a kingdom of the truth. But how shall such a kingdom keep its ground, or make way in a world such as the present? We say, "Truth is great, and will prevail"; but how often experience seems to belie this proverb! How slow the progress of truth in conflict with the evil dispositions of men! But if the truth which appeared in the person and work of Jesus be brought home to men by the power of a divine witness, and if those who are "of the truth" are put into fuller and fuller possession of it by the Spirit of truth abiding with them for ever (John xiv. 16), then the permanence

and prevalence of the kingdom of the truth are indeed secured. And those who are taught by the Spirit have an assurance of knowing the truth and standing in the light, which can be given by no external authority, as of Pope, or Council, or Priesthood.

3. From what has now been said of the inward character of the teaching of the Spirit, we may see how it is that, though this heavenly Teacher is a person, we are conscious of Him, in our experience as Christians, only, or usually, as an *influence*. While working in us, He does not seek to draw our attention to Himself. His work is to reveal Christ to us. He takes of the things of Christ, and declares them to us (John xvi. 14). There is a solemn unselfishness—if we may use the word—disclosed by Jesus in the relations of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit to one another. The Father would have all men honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. The Father, indeed, accepts no honour to Himself if like honour is refused to the Son—"He that honoureth not the Son honoureth not the Father which sent him" (John v. 23). The Son, on His part, seeks only to glorify the Father and to finish the work which the Father has given Him to do—"I honour my Father . . . I seek not mine own glory" (John viii. 49, 50). And so in like manner the aim of the Spirit is that we may behold the Son. He hides or effaces Himself. It is even said as a guarantee of His teaching that He shall not speak from Himself, or by His own initiative. He waits to hear from Jesus, who is the fountain of revelation, the special truth for which the time has come that it should be apprehended; for still Jesus teaches His people step by step as they are able to bear it, and as the time requires it. "He shall not speak from himself; but what things soever he shall hear, these shall He speak" (John xvi. 13). And Jesus

*3. Not Himself, but Jesus, is the subject and source of His teaching.*

says further, "He shall glorify me: for he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you" (xvi. 14). So, when the Spirit works most powerfully in us, we may be least conscious of Him, but most vividly conscious of Christ and of the things of Christ.

*Though in us, He does not efface our personality.*

Nor does the Spirit, though personal, efface our personality by His dwelling in us. We are not less ourselves, but more ourselves, by His working in us. So intimate is His union with our spirit, He does not see and obey the truth for us, but we find we can ourselves see and obey it. Love, joy, peace are indeed fruits of the Spirit in us; but they are our own love, our own joy, our own peace. We have become enriched in what we ourselves are.

*4. He brings us into communion with Jesus.*

4. Another feature of the work of the Spirit in us: He not only reveals Jesus to us, He brings us into communion with Him. In this way the ever-living Spirit perpetuates the presence of the great Founder of the kingdom of God in His kingdom. Other kingdoms fell because their mighty founders died. Jesus lives, and the Spirit whom He sends into the souls of believers, to dwell in them, keeps them in such vision of Him and communion with Him that, in a true sense, He is perpetually with them. Thus is fulfilled the word which Jesus spoke to the twelve in His farewell discourse: "I will not leave you orphans: I come unto you" (John xiv. 18, *margin*).

There are two comings of Jesus which have prominence in His teaching, and which may here be distinguished. There is His final coming in glory to end this dispensation by judgment. There is also a present coming, in order that His disciples may not be desolate, or "orphaned," by His ascension into heaven. It was of this latter He said in that farewell discourse, "I come unto you. Yet a little while, and the world beholdeth me no more; but ye behold me" (John xiv

18, 19). Without such a promise as this His disciples would indeed have been orphans; for what their hearts required was present communion with their Master Himself. And this they received; for, though the Spirit He promised was undoubtedly another than Jesus, the two are so connected, so "inseparable though separate," and the Spirit so reveals Jesus and so brings into communion with Him, that His disciples, through the presence of the Spirit, experienced an inward presence of their Master. Not *bodily* indeed, but *real*: the bodily presence was to end; the spiritual presence was to be for ever.

5. One other aspect of the work of the Spirit—the other Paraclete—may yet be mentioned. The Spirit is one, and His work one, but that work is manifold in its aspects and gifts. Perhaps the most fundamental aspect of it—the basis of all His working—is this, that *through Him is imparted to believers the life of Jesus*. He makes them sharers in that life. We cannot read the words of Jesus in St. John's Gospel, nor can we listen to the testimony of Christian people in all ages, without being made aware that a new life, a life of higher power, has been introduced into humanity by the coming and work of Jesus. This He declares—as we found in a former chapter (ix.)—to be the purpose of His coming: "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John x. 10). The Father is the first source of this new life, as of all life and all blessing. But the Son is the fountain of the life for us men, the well from which we draw it "The Father gave the Son to have life in himself" (John v. 26); and "The Son quickeneth (giveth life to) whom he will" (v. 21). "If thou knewest the gift of God," said Jesus at the well of Samaria, "and who it is that saith to thee, Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and

5. *Through Him the divine life is imparted.*

he would have given thee living water. . . . Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall become in him a well of water springing up unto eternal life" (John iv. 10, 14). From what He further teaches we believe that this life is ministered to us through the Spirit. It is by the working of the Spirit that the Son quickeneth whom He will. The new birth is by the Spirit (John iii. 6). The life that is in the Son passes into all who are united to Him by the Spirit whom He sends, and they are kept living and fruitful while they abide in Him, as the branches of the vine are kept living and fruitful while they abide in the vine-stem, and receive the flow of its life (John xv. 1-8). We may venture to illustrate this further from a notable resource in modern surgery. If through loss of blood a man's body is dangerously weakened, blood may be transfused into his veins from the body of a friend willing that his own abundance may be drawn upon for the great need of the other. This friend gives, as it were, of his own life to supply that which is weak and fainting in the other. So it is a provision of the kingdom of Christ, that those who believe in Him have imparted to ~~them~~, through the Spirit, of His own blessed, pure, and inexhaustible moral life, and in this manner the enfeebled powers of our human nature are replenished out of the fulness of God. It follows that the Gospel of Christ is not only world-wide in aim, not only takes for its work the redemption of mankind, and accepts for Jesus the title of "Saviour of the World" (John iv. 42; vi. 51), but brings with it a force adequate to the accomplishment of this great task.

*Accordingly:*

We are now enabled to complete the teaching of Jesus at points at which, apart from His doctrine of the Spirit, that teaching can be only imperfectly stated.

(a) For example, we saw in a former chapter (viii.) that we cannot do our part in making the great renunciation without divine help. Only with God is it possible for us to respond to the divine invitation, yield to the divine will, and exchange the temporal for the eternal. Now we may state that it is through the power of the Spirit, by His working in us, that we are enabled of God to do this. And the Spirit is promised to them that ask. "If ye . . . being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more, shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke xi. 13).

*by Him  
(a) we are  
enabled to  
enter into  
the kingdom  
of God, and*

(b) It is by the indwelling of the Spirit that we can keep the commandments of Jesus, and fulfil the righteousness which He taught. It was pointed out in a former chapter (vii.) that the religion of Jesus surpasses all others in moral motive power. This, we said, was due to His revelation of the Father. It will now be seen that it is by the gift of the indwelling Spirit that the efficiency of this revelation as a motive is secured, and the "moral dynamic" perfected. The Fatherhood of God takes irresistible hold of a soul in which is the divine life ministered to us by the Spirit; or, as we may also express it, a soul which has in it a divine life by a divine presence, takes inseparable hold of the Fatherhood of God, and is filled with the affection and impulse that are consequent on conscious sonship with God. So the man in whom the Spirit has free course will be devoted with all his soul and heart and mind to fulfilling the great commandment, "that ye may be sons of your Father which is in heaven," and "be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. v. 45, 48).

*(b) to fulfil  
the right-  
Jesus  
taught;*

(c) The Spirit is also, by the same gift of life, the alone spring and secret of the efficacy of prayer, of the word preached, and of the sacraments. Prayer in the Spirit, preaching in the Spirit, hearing in the Spirit, receiving the sacraments in the Spirit, these alone—according to the

*(c) the  
means of  
grace are  
efficacious,  
and*

analogy of our Lord's teaching, even when it is not actually expressed—are prevalent and efficacious.

(d) *the  
Gospel  
advances in  
the world.*

(d) Lastly, it is by the gift of the Spirit, divinely transforming and inspiring the followers of Jesus, that the Gospel and the kingdom of God advance in the world. "Ye shall receive power, when the Holy Ghost is come upon you : and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts i. 8). So Jesus spoke during the interval between His resurrection and the descent of the Spirit at Pentecost. And the greatness of this promise may come home to us more forcibly if we remember that it was in this same power—by the Spirit—that Jesus Himself, when He was in the flesh, spake the words of God (John iii. 34), and did His mighty deeds. The Spirit descended upon Him at His baptism (Matt. iii. 16). We believe it was then that He was "anointed with the Holy Ghost and with power" (Acts x. 38). In the power of the Spirit He entered on His ministry (Luke iv. 14). He Himself said, "I by the Spirit of God cast out devils" (Matt. xii. 28). For the great enterprise of casting out the evil of the world and overcoming Satan in it, He arms His disciples with the same power. He sends the Spirit, who is first of all the *Holy Spirit*, as the power of their own inward sanctification. He promises in regard to their preaching, "It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father that speaketh in you" (Matt. x. 20). He undertakes through the Spirit to guide them into all the truth, a promise that has been and shall be fulfilled in the progressive ages of the Church. And in a word that startles us as we read it, He says. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also ; and greater works than these shall he do ; because I go unto the Father" (John xiv. 12). It is plain from this saying that Jesus anticipated that, after the gift of

the Spirit, His disciples would have a life and a power so great that they would accomplish spiritual victories and work spiritual changes in human hearts to an extent surpassing what He Himself had done—a promise which has in fact been fulfilled, and yet awaits greater fulfilment as those who believe on Jesus receive it with greater faith.

It has been implied throughout this chapter, and may be here expressly stated in concluding it, that since Jesus came forth from the Father into the world, and again, leaving the world, went to the Father, the Spirit is given in a manner greatly excelling in value the experience of His presence enjoyed by Old Testament saints, or by any to whom Jesus has not been made known. St. John, indeed, speaks of the Spirit as, in a sense, not yet given till Jesus was glorified (John vii. 39), and in this he says no more than is implied in many words of Jesus Himself, as, for example, "If I go not away, the Paraclete will not come unto you; but if I go, I will send him unto you" (John xvi. 7). Why this is so, why the great coming of the Spirit, characteristic of the Gospel dispensation, was so long delayed, why it was dependent on Jesus being glorified, these are questions to which the wisest theologians are conscious of being able to give only imperfect answers. We refer here to the subject only that this gift of the Spirit may be the more revered, prized, and used; and that the Gospel, with which alone it is associated, may be the more honoured. Was it not because of this that after Jesus had said, "Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist," He went on and added, "Yet he that is but little in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he"?

*This great gift of the Spirit is associated with the Gospel only.*



## CHAPTER XII

### HIS TEACHING ABOUT THE CHURCH AND THE FAMILY

#### *I. The Church*

"THE Church" is a subject in regard to which there has long been great conflict of opinion, and much difference of sentiment. Some assert very high things of the Church, and claim for it very great authority; others believe and claim very little. Let us inquire what was taught on the subject by Jesus Himself.

*I. The Church seldom expressly named by Jesus, but then with emphasis.*

First, we find that He spoke very rarely of it. Only twice in all His discourses is the Church expressly named, and the report of both occasions reaches us by one evangelist (Matt. xvi. 16-19 and xviii. 15-20). We cannot, however, conclude from this that He thought the Church of small importance; for the mention He does make of it is with great emphasis. He says much regarding it in little space. Not, indeed, till far on in His ministry does He name it, but when He does, His abrupt words, "I will build my church" (Matt. xvi. 18), indicate something already long in His mind, and, though new to His disciples, deep in His own affection. How great the institution was in His thought is plain also from the emphasis of His prophecy, uttered at the same moment, that His Church would endure through all time, in spite of the powers of decay and death which are fatal to other

institutions and empires—"The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matt. xvi. 18).

The word used by Jesus, which we translate *Church*, might also be translated *congregation* (see margin of R.V. Matt. xviii. 17). It is the same word which was often used to designate God's ancient Israel, "the congregation of the Lord" (1 Chron. xxviii. 8). Jesus therefore implied that He was about to call together an elect race, and constitute a holy people, which would serve a purpose under the new covenant like to that served by Israel under the old.

What now is the purpose of the Church? What great need did Jesus see for its existence—what good to be accomplished by it? The need and call for a Church rests on facts of human nature which have their place in that nature by its original make and creation. Men do not attain the highest good of which they are capable, or have their highest power to do good, while standing alone and apart from each other. It is in union and fellowship that they come to their best and strongest. Also, in this world of things seen and material, spiritual realities obtain increased power over men's minds by having some visible embodiment. So, in accordance with human nature, the Church is formed as a union for realising, manifesting, and advancing the kingdom of God; and it accomplishes this in two ways—by the higher level of blessing to which its members, so united, attain, and by the greater power and force with which, so united, they influence the world.

*The purpose of the Church and its ground in human nature.*

If, however, the Church were no more than this, it would be simply a natural institution, and no more divine than any other association of men for worthy ends. But we find that, few as are the words of Jesus about the Church, He invests it with a specially divine character and promises to endow it with supernatural powers.

*It is specially divine—*

1. First we find it is divine *in its institution.* It is *1. In its institution,*

not formed merely by men coming together as they naturally draw to one another when they have a common belief and a common purpose. It has Jesus for its divine founder and builder. "I will build my church," He says. Accordingly it is not a matter of choice with a Christian to be a member of Christ's Church: it is his duty to his Lord.

2. In its  
bond of  
union,

2. Next we find that its *bond of union* is also supernatural. What is this bond? We see it from the instance of Peter, whom Jesus took as the first stone of the building. He was taken on the ground of a supernatural faith. Peter confessed Jesus to be the Christ, the Son of the living God; and of the faith so expressed Jesus said, "Flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." It was in virtue of this divinely-inspired faith that Peter and the other apostles (see Matt. xvi. 18 and Ephes. ii. 20) were made first stones of the sacred building, and that other disciples after them are built into it. Jesus is the founder of the Church, or—with a legitimate variation of metaphor—its "one foundation," and the claim to be built on that foundation lies in the confession of a like faith with that of Peter.

Of course it is not intellectual assent to a creed which suffices, and the actual words of confession may not be the same that Peter used. He himself, indeed, imperfectly realised the meaning of what he said. There is no reason to think that he had yet attained to the belief that Jesus was the Eternal Son of God. But he had attained to a faith in Jesus which drew his soul's trust and devotion; and whoever truly avows a like faith in Jesus, and obedience to Him, has the qualification for admission into the Church. Such a faith (as we found in chapter viii.) always has in it something that is divine.

3. Next we find that the Church is *endowed with*

supernatural powers. It has such powers because of a supernatural force sustaining it in its dealings with God and with men. What is this divine force? It is the presence of Christ, and the gift of His Spirit. Jesus in His teaching about the Church says, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt xviii. 20). So dear to Him is fellowship among His people, so much does He value it in itself and for the ends of His kingdom, that He joins Himself to the company of those who meet in His name, even though they be only two or three. Hence the old maxims, *Ubi tres, ibi Christus*, and *Ubi Christus, ibi ecclesia* ("Where three are, there is Christ," and "Where Christ is, there is the Church")<sup>1</sup> This presence of Christ is the great source of dignity and authority to the Church. And the gift of the Spirit which accompanies His presence is the Church's great source of illumination—bringing strength, comfort, wisdom, and discernment of the spirits of men. In the assembled Church, after His resurrection from the dead, Jesus said, "Peace be unto you: as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you. And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost" (John xx. 21, 22).

Let us now take note of the powers of the Church, mentioned by Jesus, which are consequent on this supernatural force. *These are—*

(a) There is first a prevailing power with God. "If two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 19). Fellowship in prayer has an exceptional power with God, even

<sup>1</sup> Contrast the Roman Catholic maxim, attributed by some to St. Ambrose, *Ubi Petrus, ibi ecclesia* ("Where Peter is, there is the Church").

though it be the fellowship of so few, because Jesus joins the company of those who meet in His name, and a company of whom He is one, and whose prayer is prompted by Him, God will undoubtedly hear. The promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20), has been called "the Charter of Public Worship."<sup>1</sup>

(b) *power  
and  
authority  
toward men.*

(b) In consequence of the same presence of Christ the Church is invested with great *power and authority towards men*. "Verily I say unto you, What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 18). That is to say, whatever the Church does in its government and discipline shall be ratified in heaven; or, in other words, the Church shall be so guided as not to err, but have God consenting with it, and its decisions shall have divine authority. Again, in John xx. 23, "Whose soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained." That is to say, the Church, or company of Christ's disciples, shall be so guided in opening or shutting the door of the kingdom of heaven, in assuring souls of forgiveness, or in declaring that their sins abide upon them, that in these solemn dealings they shall not err, but have God consenting with them. In the first form in which this great authority was given, it seemed to be given to Peter alone—"I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven." But we find in Matt. xviii. 18 and in John xx. 23 (compared with Luke xxiv. 33) the like authority extended to all the Church.

So, then, in the short teaching of Jesus regarding the Church it stands out as a divine institution, which He sustains by His presence in the Spirit, and to which He gives supernatural powers in the things of the kingdom of God.

<sup>1</sup> Goulburn, *Personal Religion*, p. 128.

This may seem startling to many, and they may have much hesitation in believing that so great powers are possessed by any Church now. The language of Jesus in regard to the Church and the actual Church which we see may not seem to correspond. But we must not try to make them correspond, as is too often done, by ignoring and overlooking the promises of Jesus to His Church, or lessening their plain meaning. It is, however, to be observed that while Jesus utters them with the fulness and certainty with which He Himself bestows, they are possessed by the Church only in the measure in which it has the faith of true discipleship, really meets in the name of Christ, and really receives the Spirit whom He gives. If it does not fulfil these spiritual conditions, the Church is no longer the body to which the promises are given; and only in proportion as it fulfils them can it be invested with the supernatural powers of which Jesus speaks. He speaks of the Church in its ideal perfection, and declares that its acts are His acts and God's acts, because of its union with Him and with God through Him. But in so far as worldly thought and motive prevent the members of the Church from meeting truly in His name, and in so far as they do not yield themselves to Him and His Spirit, the powers with which the ideal Church is invested are diminished or withdrawn. The Church, therefore, ought never to claim infallibility, being humbly conscious of imperfection. But neither should it go to the other extreme and throw away, through want of faith in Christ's words and through want of desire, the great grace and powers He promises. It is the solemn duty of those who meet to take counsel for the government and discipline of the Church to meet so truly in the name of Christ, that what they bind on earth may be bound in heaven. It is the duty of congregations so to depend on the promise of Jesus in regard to two or three gathered in His name,

*These powers bestowed fully on the Church in its ideal perfection, but possessed only in proportion to its fulfilment of the spiritual conditions.*

*Duty of the Church not to neglect these powers.*

that the prayers offered, the words spoken, and the sacraments dispensed, may assuredly have divine efficacy. Nor should the Church forget its great power in regard to the forgiveness of sins: "Whoso soever sins ye forgive, they are forgiven unto them; whose soever sins ye retain, they are retained" (John xx. 23). We cannot, of course, read this promise as if it meant that God would ratify what the Church has done in error. Nor can the Church do more in any case than declare by its forgiveness that God has forgiven, or make its forgiveness a pledge of God's. But this declaration may be of much value and power. We know that a man's heart is often greatly lightened by the forgiveness of his brethren. If he has committed sin and afterwards repented of it, the restoration to fellowship which his brethren accord him will greatly help him to attain peace. If indeed he knows them to be Christ's servants, men who have received the Holy Ghost, their forgiveness will be a deep assurance to him that he has received the forgiveness of God. The Church should by no means forget or neglect to use such a ministry of peace committed to it. Nor again should it leave unused the power given it of "retaining" sins. A very powerful effect in convincing of sin and bringing to repentance may be produced by the Church witnessing in regard to sin in which a brother is living, or excluding him from its fellowship as one who has no longer the place of a brother in Christ, but is become "as the Gentile and the publican" (Matt. xviii. 17).

*Organisation of the Church deferred, and therefore teaching on the ministry deferred, till after the Church's actual beginning at Pentecost.*

In the short teaching of Jesus about the Church there is nothing expressly said about its ministry. The Church, like every other society that is to be efficient, must have rulers, and must be so organised that its work may be divided according to the various gifts and talents of its members. This organisation hardly began, however, while Jesus was on earth, and He does not give directions

- for, it in His teaching. The twelve apostles are the first stones—in a sense, the foundation stones—not of the Christian ministry, but of the whole Christian Church, just as the twelve patriarchs are the foundation stones of the whole Old Testament Church. And the promises which the apostles received were, in general, promises for the whole Church. That this is so in regard to the promises we are now dealing with may be ascertained by observing that all the three verses—Matt. xviii. 18,<sup>1</sup> 19, 20—are addressed to the same persons; and plainly the promise in the last verse, which is the ground of all the power spoken of, is not withheld from any two or three Christian souls. Also the great power to forgive sins as a pledge of God's forgiveness (John xx. 23), which is the same as "the power of the keys" first given to Peter (Matt. xvi. 19), was given to a company in which, as we learn from Luke xxiv. 33, ordinary disciples were assembled as well as apostles. It is necessary to direct attention to this, because great abuses have arisen in the history of the Christian Church through the promises of supernatural power being claimed exclusively for men ordained to the office of the ministry, as if these powers belonged to that office alone, and were infallibly conveyed to all who are ordained to it in unbroken succession.
- Where Jesus said "the Church," the ministry, as a hierarchy of the Church, has been understood—an error from which those who read the English Bible would have been kept more safe had our translation read in these passages *congregation* for *church*, as was the case in all the early English versions. What the place of the Christian ministry is in the Church, and what powers Christ gives to those whom He calls to the office, must be learned from the history of the Church after the ascension

<sup>1</sup> In the margin of his translation, opposite verse 18, Tindale puts the note, "Here *all* bind and loose."



of Jesus, and from the apostolic writings. Not till Jesus had ascended did the Church actually exist and its organisation make progress. While Jesus was yet in the flesh His promise to be present everywhere with two or three met in His name could not be fulfilled. It was a prophetic promise. Nor was the Holy Ghost fully given till the day of Pentecost after Jesus had ascended. From that day we date the existence on earth of the divine institution of the Church of Christ.

*Work for which the Church exists—*

The great work for which the Church exists, of realising, revealing, and furthering the kingdom of God, divides itself, as already indicated, into two portions—the nourishing of the faith and life of the members of the Church, and the spreading of the Gospel among those outside of it.

*1. Within the Church, for which these means are appointed:*  
*(1) united worship,*  
*(2) discipline,*  
*(3) mutual care,*  
*(4) the ministry,*  
*(5) sacraments.*

1. For the former end we see that the means appointed by Jesus in His Church are—(1) the united worship, to which He has attached the great promise of His presence; (2) the discipline, for the exercise of which He has also given His Church authority and power; (3) the mutual love and care for each other which He urges on His disciples; (4) the ministry of His word, and the pastoral care both exercised by Himself while on earth, and to be exercised afterwards by those whom He calls to such ministry in the Spirit; and (5) the two symbolic ordinances commonly (though never in the New Testament) called *sacraments*.

*Ground of sacraments in reason.*

The institution by Jesus of these last-named was, like the Church itself, an adaptation to facts of our human nature with which we are familiar. Spiritual and unseen realities, though supreme in their importance, are apt to be dwarfed in our thoughts by the obtrusive pressure of things seen, and they gain greatly increased power over our minds by having some visible embodiment. A tangible symbol may be a help to our faith, and by means of it we

may grasp more firmly things unseen. It is also a fact of our human nature that such blessings as those of the kingdom of God have much more power in our life when we not only have them, but know that we have them. The sacraments are ordinances in which these blessings are conveyed or assured to us, not, as in preaching, by word only, but by visible symbol, in which we take hold of them, as it were, by a material handle, and so have greater assurance of possessing them. The sacraments do not convey to us any other blessings than those which are conveyed to us by the word of Christ. Nothing higher can be given us than Jesus names in this saying about His word, "The words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life" (John vi. 63). Nor do the sacraments convey the blessings of the kingdom of God to us on any other terms than those which the preaching of the word requires. If we have not faith and truth in our hearts we receive nothing by them. But they are, as it were, "a visible word"<sup>1</sup> and a tangible word, in the use of which our faith may attain great vividness, assurance, and blessing.

Christian baptism was instituted by Jesus just before *Baptism*. He "was received up," as a sacrament of entrance into His kingdom. "Go ye . . . and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost" (Matt. xxviii. 19). The "name" of God means, in Scripture, the revelation of what He is. Baptism is therefore into the great faith of the kingdom of God, the faith in God, revealed by Jesus, as Father, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. In this faith the baptized person is henceforth to live. And the water of cleansing used in baptism symbolises the blessings received in entering the kingdom of God, viz. the forgiveness of sins by the blood of Christ, and

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine.

cleansing from sin's inward pollution by His life-giving Spirit. That so great blessings are assured will not be felt incredible if those who take part in baptism remember the words which Jesus spoke in the same sentence in which He instituted it—"Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20).

*The Lord's  
Supper.*

The Lord's Supper, as shown by the words and acts of Jesus in instituting it (Matt. xxvi. 26-28; Mark xiv. 22-24; Luke xxii. 19, 20; 1 Cor. xi. 23-25), is—(a) a feast of remembrance—"This do in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. xi. 24). By this commemoration, in which the bread and wine are symbols of His body broken and His blood shed, the Christian Church has its love quickened through all ages, and its faith still centred on Jesus and on His death for our salvation. (b) The Lord's Supper is a feast of reconciliation with God by the death of Jesus. It is a feast following on a sacrifice, as when in Old Testament times the offerers of a sin-offering rejoiced before God in their being reconciled to Him. The sacrifice of the Cross, though now so far back in time, is of undiminished power with God as an atonement for sins. So, for this feast of reconciliation, no new offering is needed; emblems of that offering are enough, bread broken and wine poured out. By means of them what is present in power to God becomes present to our faith. (c) The Lord's Supper is also an occasion of Jesus communicating to us, and of our receiving and having nourished in us, that divine and eternal life which (as we saw in chapter ix.) it was His great errand into the world to give. Jesus is present in the Lord's Supper, according to the promise, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matt. xviii. 20). Not only are bread and wine placed on the table, according to His word; not only are they broken and poured out—this would be enough if joyful meditation

on His death for our sins were the whole purpose of the supper—but He says also with the bread, “Take, eat, this is my body,” and with the cup, “Drink ye all of it.” Obviously He communicates to us in this ordinance, and we receive. And from other words of His, spoken at an earlier time, “He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life” (John vi. 54), it is plain that what we receive is the life of which He repeatedly declares Himself to be the one source—a life which He received from the Father,\* but could communicate to us only after first giving Himself in death as a sacrifice for the sin of the world (John vi. 51).

2. Passing now to the other great end for which the Church exists—the spreading of the Gospel of the kingdom among those outside of it—we see two great means contemplated by Jesus.

*2. Work beyond the Church*

*Means of advancing the Gospel*

(1) The unity of the Church—the unity of its members, in God and in one another—and the powerful effect on the world of the testimony of this union in a divine life.

*(1) the unity of the Church,*

“Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word, that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us that the world may believe that thou didst send me” (John xvii. 20, 21). For the strengthening of this great testimony, Jesus urged upon His disciples what He called His “new commandment,”—of a special love to one another. “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John xiii. 34, 35).

(2) The second means appointed by Jesus for the spread of His Gospel is the missionary preaching of the Church. He gave His disciples this great commission: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to the

*(2) its missionary preaching*

whole creation" (Mark xvi. 15); "Go ye . . . and make disciples of all the nations" (Matt. xxviii. 19). With this command He gave great assurances for their support on actual missionary service. He gave the promise of His continual presence: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20). He gave the assurance of His power in heaven, and of His providential sway over all lands into which they might go: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. xxviii. 18). And in the tenth chapter of St. Matthew we find a wonderful store of counsels and assurances to missionaries, some only for the time then present, as, for example, that they should not enter into any city of the Samaritans; but those in the latter part of the chapter meant for all time. He forewarns of the worst oppositions, but emboldens against these by His own experience, and by the thought of the great future (vv. 24-28, 34-39). He assures of the care of a Father, without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground (vv. 29-31). And in regard to the dignity of their errand, and the momentous issue of their preaching, He speaks in this manner: "He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me" (ver. 40); "He that rejecteth you rejecteth me; and he that rejecteth me rejecteth him that sent me" (Luke x. 16).

*Duties  
suggested.*

After thus reviewing what Jesus teaches about His Church, two things may especially appeal to us as duties —(1) To do what in us lies to raise to a far higher level that unity among disciples of Jesus which He so values both for its own sake and for the world's sake; and (2) to realise, much more than is common, the sacredness of the Church and of every Christian assembly. Who are they who contribute most to the spiritual power and blessing of our meetings on the Lord's Day? Not those who are merely eminent in talent, wealth, or station, but

those, however obscure or weak, who come most truly in the name of Jesus, and so secure that presence of His which is the one source of the Church's dignity and authority, and that gift of His Spirit which is the one power of blessing.

## II. The Family

From our study of Jesus' teaching on the Church we turn to what He says in regard to the family. We do this with the more interest because, according to the testimony of all history, the worth and blessing of men and nations depend in large measure on the character and ordering of the family life.

In the case of the people among whom Jesus was born and taught, the family life was already at a high level, as we might conclude from the two noble examples of the households of Joseph and Mary, and of Zacharias and Elizabeth. Such a family life, with its roots in ancient faith and true devotion, was one of the preparations for the sending of the Son of God into the world as Son of Man; and not even Christian family life has ever received such honour as when the childhood and youth of Jesus were entrusted to the care of Joseph and Mary. In the belief of the Jews, according to their ancient traditions and Scriptures, the family, with marriage on which it was founded, was a divine institution. But in one point especially Jesus corrected their practice and understanding of the divine law. He declared marriage to be according to God's original design in creation, indissoluble. *Jesus teaching on marriage,* He quoted words familiar to His hearers from the earliest chapters of Genesis about the making of man and woman, from which He drew the conclusion in regard to married persons, "They are no more twain, but one flesh" (Mark x. 8); and this unity being of God, man cannot dissolve it. The practice of divorce allowed by

the law of Moses, on the one condition of a writing of divorcement being given—a writing the drawing up of which might indeed give occasion for reflection and relenting—Jesus declared to be only a concession to the hardness of their hearts, and not according to the divine ideal. Divorce, He taught, was permissible only when by sin an actual dissolution of the unity of the flesh had already been made. Every marriage receives a greatly added solemnity from these words of Jesus which remove it out of the category of merely human arrangements, “What God hath joined together”; and law, whether of Church or State, has received a guidance not to be refused from His words that follow, “Let not man put asunder” (Mark x. 9).

*and in  
regard to  
children.*

Another feature of Jesus' teaching in regard to the family—He taught a reverence for young children which is of a depth, and founded on reasons, which we still find mysterious. “See that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven” (Matt. xviii. 10). “Whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me” (Matt. xviii. 5).

*The  
Christian  
family a  
part of the  
kingdom of  
God*

When we ask what is the relation between the family and the Church, both being divine institutions, or between the family and the kingdom of God, we may answer shortly that the family is a divine institution of the natural order, belonging to man's original creation; the Church is a divine institution of the supernatural order. In the Church the kingdom of God is, imperfectly indeed, but truly realised. But the family is also raised into the kingdom of God, and becomes a part of it, when the heads of it are united to Christ by faith in Him. To justify this, let it be remembered that, according to the original and unchanging order of family life, children are dependent on their parents, both in respect of their body and their mind. Not only are they under the authority and disci-

pline of their parents, but their natural relation to their father and mother is such that they instinctively adopt their parents' ideas, and receive from them, almost involuntarily, the great bulk of their beliefs. The family is an organic unity, and the ethical and spiritual life of the parents is a vital force which flows into and gives its character to the life of the children. Accordingly, if the parents are in Christ, the children are also in Christ. The principle is expressed in the maxim of St. Paul: "If the root is holy, so are the branches" (Rom. xi. 16). And that this is recognised by Jesus we see from the fact that He accepted the faith of the parent as sufficient ground for bestowing blessing on the child. When the demoniac boy was brought to Him, He said to the father: "All things are possible to him that believeth," and when the father cried out, "I believe; help thou mine unbelief" (Mark ix. 23, 24), Jesus healed the child. So again, when parents brought young children to Him, He said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me; forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. . . . And he took them in his arms, and blessed them, laying his hands upon them" (Mark x. 14, 16). We conclude that the Christian family, as a whole, is part of the kingdom of God. The children are to be brought up as in reconciliation with God "from the beginning of their lives. They are "in the Lord," as St. Paul assumes (see Ephes. vi. 1), and are to be taught from the first that they belong to Christ and can call God "Father." Their baptism does not bestow this standing on them, as they have it by birth within a Christian family. But baptism gives solemn assurance of the grace wherein they stand, and may be, in the first instance, a great help to the faith of their parents, while to themselves, as they are afterwards instructed regarding it, it may be a powerful means of moving them to keep the rank, use the privileges, and live in the hopes of children of God.



## CHAPTER XIII

### HIS TEACHING ABOUT PRAYER

WE give in this chapter some account of our Lord's teaching about prayer, especially as it bears on difficulties that are felt in the present time.

*Prayer is  
"the characteristic  
action of  
religion."*

Prayer is "the characteristic action of religion."<sup>1</sup> It is an instinct as wide as religion itself. In moments of danger a cry of prayer has been found instinctive in men who thought they had ceased to believe that prayer was of any value. It may be said of the highest minds of all ages that it was instinctive in them to look up and utter such prayer as this, "O send out Thy Light and Thy Truth, let them lead me!" All devout people agree that prayer is a means of great blessing, great comfort, great help, great illumination. And the effect of it on their character is so manifest as to obtain the acknowledgment even of men who do not believe in God.

*Difficulties  
felt about  
prayer.*

But difficulties have been suggested in regard to prayer, —some of them old, some of them new,—by which even devout people have been embarrassed. It has, for example, been urged that, if God knows already and has foreordained all things, prayer cannot now make any difference: it is therefore offered in vain. And in our age the "reign of law"—the great discovery of "the uniformity of nature"—has

<sup>1</sup> Liddon, *Some Elements of Religion*.

been so presented for our belief by men of science that not a few Christian men feel great force in the objection to prayers for good weather, for better health, for the gift of children, and for temporal good things generally. Weather, it is urged, comes according to laws as fixed as those which govern the rising of the sun and the courses of the stars. It depends on causes that are at work already, and have been at work since the origin of material things. To pray for weather different from that towards which these causes are already working would be to ask a new universe from the beginning. To similar objections all prayer is liable when the answer depends on the course of physical nature.

Pressed by these arguments from God's foreordination and the uniformity of nature, people who still believe in good and blessing as results of prayer tend to divide into two classes.

*Consequently two main beliefs about it*

1. Some yield to these arguments, and believe that though it is good to draw near to God—good for us to commune with Him as our best Friend, to speak of all our life to Him and consider it in His presence, assured that if we do so we shall leave His presence comforted and prepared for His will—yet our prayers cannot influence His action, because they cannot now alter what He has decreed or affect the course of nature. Our Lord's example is appealed to as confirming this attitude. It is pointed out that much of His great prayer in the seventeenth chapter of St. John's Gospel was not even in the form of request, and that of the great cry and prayer of Jesus in the garden, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; yet, nevertheless, not my will but thine be done," only the latter part was answered: "not my will but thine be done" was alone effective, and it was effective simply in the preparation of His own spirit for His Father's will. The conclusion is come to that prayer in which requests are made is like a man in a boat pulling at a rope who seems to bring

*1. That prayer works only on man.*

the land near to him, but in reality brings himself near to it. In prayer we do not influence God's action; we bring ourselves into agreement with God, we get happily reconciled to what is best. Our Heavenly Father knoweth what things we have need of before we ask him (Matt. vi. 8); therefore our telling our needs does not suggest a wiser course to Him, but when we so speak to Him it reacts on ourselves and increases our trust. In a word, if the question is put—Does prayer work on God or does it work on man?—the answer we get from many in our day is, *On man*. Prayer (they say) is a spiritual gymnastic. A man never really wrestles with God, he simply wrestles with himself in God's presence.

2. That  
prayer  
really works  
on God, and  
through  
Him on all  
things.

2. But there is still the view of prayer, that it does influence the will and action of God, that it really *works on God*, and through Him on all things.

We are not debarred from thinking this when we admit that God has foreordained all things, or even when we admit the fixed order and uniformity of external nature. For no one who believes in God and His sovereign foreordination of all things can doubt that in foreordaining He took account of men's actions, which are more or less completely the result of their free-will. We are conscious that we are free; our freedom is the ground of all moral blame or praise in our conduct. Our free actions have a great share in deciding our destiny, and God must have allowed for these, and taken account of them in that infinite mystery, His foreordination of all things. And we may have confidence that if He did this, He could equally have allowed for and taken account of our prayers. Though we believe that God has foreordained all, we do not on that account say, "It is no use our doing anything." As little need we say, "It is no use our praying."

There still survives accordingly the belief that prayer is efficacious by working on God, and that, profoundly

mysterious as are God's government and the relation of His infinite mind to our finite thoughts,—profoundly mysterious as His eternal foreknowledge is,—we shall think rightly of prayer if we believe that it influences Him and influences the whole world of things that come from Him. This is still the belief of the great body of Christian people, learned and unlearned.

To whom shall we appeal on this great subject? How shall we decide which of these beliefs we shall live by—that prayer works only on man, or that it works not on man only but really and truly on God? *Appeal for decision,*

We may carry this appeal to our Lord Jesus Christ, and we may carry it also to the court of devout experience. First let us ask, what do we learn on the subject from the teaching and example of Jesus? *first to our Lord's teaching.*

"It came to pass, as he was praying in a certain place, that when he ceased, one of his disciples said unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, even as John also taught his disciples" (Luke xi. 1). Our Lord had been praying aloud, and the disciples, as they listened, longed to pray like Him: so they made this request. In answer He gave them what we know as "The Lord's Prayer," and from the form and contents of that prayer we may learn much. The opening words, "*Our Father which art in heaven,*" will help us to answer the questions before us. His teaching on prayer, like all His teaching, rests for its foundation on God's Fatherhood,—on the belief that the Supreme Will of the universe is His Father and our Father. This being so, two things seem to follow at once about prayer. *His teaching founded on God's Fatherhood.*

(1) That God is entreatable by His children; in other words, that He will hear and be moved by their prayers; and (2) that God being infinitely greater, wiser, and better than His children, the answer He gives may be what they ask, or it may be something else, what they ask being *This implies that God is influenced by His children's prayers.*

withheld in love. God and His human creatures are, in the teaching of Jesus, a family, and it would be a strange family in which the child's request did not affect the father or his action; it would also be a strange family in which the child's will dictated. The single word "Father" teaches us much about prayer: it surely implies that, in whatever way He responds to the prayer, God is entreatable by His children; their prayer reaches Him and moves Him. It also implies that every true prayer, being that of a submissive child, will be offered with this condition, "if it be Thy holy will."

*Our Lord's encouragements imply that God is like man in being moved to give by asking.*

After teaching "the Lord's prayer" Jesus immediately followed this up by encouragements to the practical use of prayer (Luke xi. 5 ff.), and here again the unmistakable drift and purport of these is just this very thing, that prayer does avail to influence God, and to obtain what, without prayer, would not have been obtained.

Jesus here takes for granted one of those profound truths of religion which are conveyed in the first chapter of Genesis, the truth implied in the announcement that God made man in His own image. Jesus assumes that God and man are like; that therefore from what man does we may learn of God; especially that from the best we find in man we may rightly shape our thought of God. But with surprising freedom does Jesus use man to illustrate God. He supposes a case of a very homely kind—a man of humblest rank, in a house of one room, with his little children at night in the same bed. To this man a friend comes in an emergency asking three loaves. It is wonderful that Jesus should use such a man in order that from his conduct we should learn of God. Still more wonderful it seems to us when we find the man to be somewhat churlish and selfish. At first he refuses his friend's prayer on account of the time of night and the trouble. He yields in the end, but rather for the selfish

reason that he may get rid of his friend's importunity. Who but Jesus could have ventured to suggest a lesson about God and importunate prayer to Him from the example of such a man?

Further on (Luke xviii. 1) Jesus tells a story of a very bad man, an unjust judge—so bad that he avows to himself he neither fears God nor regards man—refusing to do justice to a widow till after great importunity, and then for the shamefully selfish reason, "Lest she wear me out by her continual coming" (Luke xviii. 5). "And the Lord said, Hear what the unrighteous judge saith. And shall not God avenge his elect, which cry to him day and night, and he is longsuffering over them?" (Luke xviii. 6, 7).

The plain purpose and drift of these passages is that, as certainly as in our experience prayer avails with men and we get by asking, so certainly does it avail with God. He is moved to give by our asking. Jesus would say, "If you find a selfish sort of kindness in man, believe that there is true kindness in God. If a man very imperfect in friendliness yields to importunity which annoys him, or if a specially wicked man, like that judge, yields to importunity which he hates, how much more will God, to whom it is a pleasure to be importuned—a pleasure, because it shows His children's great trust in Him.

Having in this striking manner encouraged expectation in prayer from what we find in *selfish* human nature, our Lord completes His argument by appeal to the nobler side of men. From their fatherly affections He argues to the Fatherly heart of God. "And of which of you that is a father shall his son ask a loaf, and he give him a stone? or a fish, and he for a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he give him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your

children, how much more shall your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?" (Luke xi. 11-13; in Matt. vii. 11, "give good things to them that ask him?")

*This confirmed by Jesus teaching us to pray for others,*

In concluding from such passages that Jesus would have us believe that prayer really avails with God, we are confirmed by the fact that He teaches us to pray to God for gracious influences upon others, even upon people with whom we have no acquaintance. "Pray ye the Lord of the harvest, that he send forth labourers into his harvest" (Matt. ix. 38). If prayer did good only by its reaction on the man who prays, this prayer and all intercessory prayer would be useless.

*and by the manner of asking in prayer which has His authority.*

We are confirmed also by the simple fact that the Lord's Prayer, portions of His own great prayer (John xvii. 1, 5, 11, 17), and other prayers which are our models, have still the form of asking God to do or to give. If prayer worked only on man, such form in prayer would be but a condescension to our weakness and to the humble level of our spiritual attainment. At a higher level, and with a better understanding of God's government and the laws of nature, we should cease to ask; we should simply praise, adore, and open ourselves to the light that comes from God, and get ready to receive with thankful resignation what should be found to be His will. So we should do if the whole account of prayer were this which is given by a man certainly most devout—Thomas Erskine of Linlathen. After saying what prayer is not, he goes on further—"It is rather an attempt to enter into the mind of God concerning us, and to open our hearts to receive from Him." This is indeed part of prayer,—a very blessed part of it. Undoubtedly he who rightly prays opens himself to God and yields himself to the influences of God's Spirit; and oftentimes the prayers he will thus be led to offer will be at a far higher level than those which were in his mind when he went

to his knees to pray. But if this were the whole of prayer, Jesus would, we believe, have taught us to be done with illusions, to cease shaping our words to God in the form of *asking*. All the prayer He would have taught us, or would Himself have used, would have been in the form, "Thy will be done." Our Lord still encourages us to ask, sets no limit to what we may ask except what is implied in the expression "good things" (Matt. vii. 11), and He encourages us to believe that trustful importunity—the importunity of a true child—does influence God, and does prevail to obtain what would not otherwise be given.

Nor is there any sign in our Lord's teaching that a limit to the efficacy of prayer is drawn at material things, such as sunshine and rain, that prayer avails only for spiritual and mental things and does not cross the boundary to temporal blessings and things occurring in the course of physical nature. And it also bears conclusively, we think, on the question of the reach and scope of prayer, that in our Lord's teaching about God's providence, when He says, Not a sparrow falleth to the ground without your Father, and, The very hairs of your head are all numbered, He implies a disposal and adaptation of the smallest physical events to our needs and to our good. If our heavenly Father can have regard to our needs in appointing all things, surely He can and does have regard to our prayers. A belief in the efficacy of prayer, and a belief in the special providence taught by Jesus, stand or fall together.

We have still to consider notable sayings of our Lord in regard to prayer, which seem to invest it with power beyond what we have thus far claimed for it. They seem to put us on ways of praying, or to tell secrets in regard to prayer, by means of which we can

*Our Lord does not exclude prayer for what is temporal or physical.*

*Prayers to which our Lord gives absolute promise of answer.*



*Prayer in  
His name.*

even compel an answer, and the very thing we ask will be infallibly obtained. For example, our Lord says, "Whatever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask me anything in my name, that will I do" (John xiv. 13, 14). This was one of the promises given by Jesus in His farewell discourse; and that it was something new, something very valuable, and something for the "day," or dispensation of the Spirit, is plain from his saying again, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be fulfilled" (John xvi. 24): "In that day ye shall ask in my name" (xvi. 26). This is evidently something different from asking "for Christ's sake"—so using his mediation—which is a proper characteristic of all our prayers. We may get help to know what it means by recalling the words of St. Peter to the lame man (Acts iii.), "Silver and gold have I none; but what I have, that give I thee. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Peter meant by these words that it was not by his own power or holiness he was now acting, but as Christ's ambassador, to whom power was given to speak in His name. To pray in the name of Christ will therefore be to make request of God as Christ's ambassador, to speak to God as prompted by the Lord Jesus, having the request we make put into our hearts by the Spirit whom Christ sends in His own room and stead; so that our request is ultimately Christ's, and we ask in His name. When it is given to any one to pray thus, out of a heart ruled and moved by Christ's spirit, raised completely above selfishness, egotism, or presumption, he may ask with perfect confidence of being answered; and usually such high prayer will be accompanied by absolute assurance of its answer.

This latter feature leads naturally to another startling

promise of Jesus—"Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall say unto this mountain, Be thou taken up and cast into the sea; and shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that what he saith cometh to pass; he shall have it. Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye have received them, and ye shall have them" (Mark xi. 23, 24). It is easy to misunderstand these words. They may be taken to mean that if a man can only be confident enough—presumptuous enough—God will be compelled to act for him, so that this promise may be kept. But faith in God and presumption are very different things. True faith in asking dwells only with a certain character. The very next words in St. Mark, and many sayings in St. Matthew, tell us that if a man does not forgive his brother, no prayer he can offer will bring him his own forgiveness. Faith like this here spoken of, which attains in prayer to believing that we have received, is given only to a heart that is in perfect tune with the will of God. It is, in fact, the very same mind and heart we have described before, which by the Spirit of Christ is raised above selfishness, presumption, revenge. To such a heart it will be given to ask and to have confidence in asking even to the removal of mountains.<sup>1</sup>

*Prayer with  
faith that  
we have  
received.*

Our Lord's teaching here, as often, has the emphasis of paradox. And the mountain He speaks of must not be taken as a mountain of stone whose removal would be a mere display of magical power, but as some great hindrance in the way of the good of men and the coming of the Lord. Similar language we have in the prophets—"Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain" (Zech. iv. 7; see also Isaiah

<sup>1</sup> Compare the promise in John xv. 7, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

xl. 4). And we do not doubt that often to humble Christian souls who have long meditated on the hindrances to the Gospel of Christ it has been given to ask in the faith that removes mountains; and lo ! workers in Christ's field have suddenly found the great obstacles, by which they have been long arrested, removed out of the way.

*Prayer in fellowship.*

Yet another promise of absolute assurance in regard to prayer is given by Jesus. "Again I say unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven" (Matt. xviii. 19). A reason for this He Himself gives, "For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (ver. 20). When we consider this reason we see that the promise is closely related to the former promise regarding prayer *in His name*. Fellowship of Christian people, for reasons both of nature and grace, has an elevating influence on their souls. And when they draw near to God together they naturally drop out of their prayers whatever is selfish. The flame of divine affection burns and purges out the dross of worldliness. Helped by their common faith they have a special sense of Christ's presence: they yield themselves to the leading of His Spirit, and what they ask is often in a wonderful degree above the level of their personal cares. Their prayer moves in a sphere of ampler hope, fuller light, and more assured harmony with the gracious will of God. In such a company it is natural, as it were, that the prayer should be of the kind described by Jesus as asking *in His name*.

*Conclusion from appeal to our Lord's teaching.*

The general conclusion to which we come from the study of our Lord's teaching in regard to prayer is that when we make request of our heavenly Father in the spirit of children we may assure ourselves that our prayer will truly have influence on Him and on all things through Him. There is nothing illusory in our Lord's promise, "Ask,

and it shall be given you" (Matt. vii. 7). We learn also from our Lord's teaching that there are higher levels of prayer to which Christian souls may rise when two or three are met in Christ's name and they are agreed in what they ask; to which they may also rise in private prayer, when they are led by the Spirit into a high unselfishness, raised above all presumption and all haste; when they share Christ's sorrow for the world and are moved to ask in unhindered union with Christ. Then they pray *in His name*: then they pray as having a commission from Him: then they believe, while they ask, that they have received. And to such prayer an omnipotence is given: nothing shall be impossible to it.<sup>1</sup>

We would still carry the question with which we began—does prayer work on God—or, in other words, does God really answer prayer—into the court of Christian experience.

*Appeal on  
the general  
question to  
Christian  
experience.*

The question cannot be decided by scientific experiment such as that to which Christian people were challenged some years ago. It was proposed that one ward of a hospital should be chosen for whose inmates prayers should be offered, while the other wards were passed over: the efficacy of prayer, if real, would then be shown by the higher percentage of recoveries in the ward prayed for. Such a test would be proper and legitimate if prayer were a force, natural or magical, and "God" were simply the name for another force which could be determined or directed by prayer. But if God is a living person—the Father of all—how dare we approach Him with a prayer

<sup>1</sup> See Bishop Chadwick's paper on "Prayer in the name of Christ" in *The Expositor*, Third series, vol. vi. While many prayers are largely prompted by Christ's Spirit and, therefore, in measure, prayers in His name, it is a rare thing, we may believe, for prayer to be offered in the high consciousness described in the text. One of the most eminent evangelists of this generation—we do not name him, as the conversation was private—said that only two or three times in his life had he been able to pray in the name of Christ.

which desires Him to treat with comparative neglect some of His suffering children and presumptuously omits submission to His loving wisdom? The experiment was one on which no one could enter who knows and believes the first words of the Lord's prayer, "Our Father."

It will be found, however, to be the testimony of all devout people that God has manifested Himself in their lives as the hearer of prayer. Sometimes this occurs in a way that strikes even those who have had no such experience of their own. The head of the "Orphan Homes of Scotland"<sup>1</sup> tells in the following manner how he was led to begin his work on a large scale. Urged on to this by a friend, he prayed during three months for guidance, resolving that if God would send him the two thousand pounds needed to start the enterprise, he would embark upon it. No one who reads his narrative, telling how the very sum he waited for came to him, can wonder that this was to his mind an answer to his prayer. Very many such incidents are found in the lives of eminent Christians. They are not of course *proofs* which can convince an unbeliever. To him they may seem still explicable as coincidences. And it must be understood that, in general, the answering of prayer is a secret between the man who prays and God. He cannot always say to the unbeliever, "I prayed for a certain thing and I got what I asked." What he would oftentimes rather say is this—"I prayed for a gift and my heavenly Father answered me by raising my desires above it." Or this—"He has given me something different from what I asked, and now I see that I was foolish to ask as I did." Or this again—"He has made His grace sufficient for me, and I am fully content without what I asked." The experience which all devout people have of spiritual gain and enlargement of soul, of lightening and deliverance, through prayer, is part of their most assured life: but it

<sup>1</sup> Mr. William Quarrier.

cannot be fully told or known abroad. It is an experience too intimate, and requires for its verification such a knowledge of the inner life of the man who prays as he cannot give to any other. When we take into account also the influences of God's Spirit to which the disciple of Christ yields himself when he prays, we see that prayer is a divine mystery: that how much of it is God's and how much of it is man's we cannot tell.<sup>1</sup> "Prayer," says Bishop Monrad, "is a world by itself." To it applies in a special manner what has been finely said of the Christian faith as a whole — "The Christian faith is a grand cathedral with divinely pictured windows. Standing *without*, you see no glory, nor can possibly imagine any: standing *within*, every ray of light reveals a harmony of unspeakable splendours."<sup>2</sup>

#### NOTE A

To avoid confusion a third alternative has not been named explicitly in this chapter (although partly dealt with in some sentences), namely, that prayer is effective with God and through Him in all the region of the mind and thoughts of men, but not in the sphere of physical nature. According to such a belief God may, in answer to prayer for the sick, suggest a cure to the mind of the physician, but nothing ever happens which infringes on the course of nature, which our science has found to be unchanging and inviolable. This view has commended itself to Dr. Martineau, Professor Knight, and others, who by no means deny the power of God to act differently, but believe that He has so limited Himself for great and worthy ends.

*A third alternative about prayer.*

But when scientific men tell us that the whole order of nature is inviolable and deny to God the exercise of a power which He has in considerable measure given to men

<sup>1</sup> See note B at the end of the chapter.

<sup>2</sup> Nathaniel Hawthorne.

—the power, namely, of freely affecting that order—they surely go beyond what their knowledge of nature entitles them to assert. “They have but seen,” said Carlyle, “some handbreadths deeper than we into the deep that is without bottom as it is without shore.” The modern advance of knowledge itself reveals how vast are the unexplored depths of nature. The greatest living man of science, Lord Kelvin, recently spoke of his fifty years of labour as *failure*, in regard to those discoveries of nature’s secrets with the hope of which he began his life: he found himself still as far as ever from knowing what *life* is, or what *gravitation* is, or what other great natural energies are. Till we have explored up to the limit of nature and till we also know how God is immanent in nature (for His immanence is a general belief of our time), we shall be rash to account that physical nature is a sphere wholly outside of influence by prayer to God.

It may be said, generally, that in speaking of what God may do, we are apt to overlook how great a thing we have said of Him when we have agreed to describe Him as *infinite*. The whole universe of matter and the whole universe of time shrivel and contract to the mind of God if He be infinite. With ease He adjusts the relations of all particles in space: may He not adjust, with equal ease, the relations of all events affecting men and all prayers offered by men in time?

### NOTE B

*In our  
account of  
prayer is  
there a  
faulty  
circle?*

It may be said that if we describe the highest prayer as prompted by God, we move in a faulty circle, and that prayer is then no longer man acting on God but God acting on Himself through man. This influence from God we admit to be one of the facts about prayer that make it a divine mystery; but it must be remembered that in this

circle our free-will comes in and has part. It is ours to refuse the prompting of God's Spirit, or to welcome it, even to ask it. And when we welcome that prompting, the prayer we freely offer is as much our own prayer as any other; and we have no less joy in its being answered. Our whole mental and spiritual life is a mystery: we cannot explain it; we can only state it as it is.

What we have said in this chapter we may here fortify by quoting these sentences from Delitzsch:—

"God, by virtue of the mysterious interlacing of necessity and freedom in His nature and operations, has granted a power to the prayer of faith, to which He consents to yield; by virtue of His absoluteness, which is anything but blind necessity, He has placed Himself in such relation to men that He not merely works upon them by means of His grace, but allows them to work on Him by means of their faith."—*Commentary on Pentateuch*, vol. i. p. 231 (T. & T. Clark).

"Everywhere in the world where prayer is offered this is done in the certainty that prayer has effect on God and can call forth active help in return. There is more reason in the *consensus gentium* than in the doctrines of isolated thinkers, even be they so great as Schleiermacher and Ritschl."—*The Expositor*, third series, vol. ix. p. 51.



## CHAPTER XIV

### HIS TEACHING ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD

*What is the  
world's  
destined  
end?*

WHAT is this world coming to? Will the history of mankind have an end, and what kind of an end? Has that history a purpose running through it, and a destined issue to which it advances? Who will give us an answer to these and similar questions, which may well command the interest of any human soul?

*Answers  
from human  
speculation.*

If we ask men of science they will answer, perhaps, that they infer, from what comes under their observation, one certain end to human life in the world. They find that the heat of the sun diminishes. That great source of heat and support of life seems to be slowly using up the materials by which its fire is sustained. The time is perhaps calculable—mathematically calculable—on the lapse of which the sun will be exhausted, or its heat sink so low that this earth will no longer be capable of sustaining human life, and that life must finally expire. This issue is certain, if things go on as they are doing. It is indeed infinitely remote, but even so, if it be the true issue, if man must go down to the pit and all his thoughts perish, human life and history, ending in nothing, are smitten as with a blight. Their interest and worth have departed.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "We sound the future, and learn that after a period, long com-

If we put our question to moralists, who judge of the future of mankind by what they see of human progress along the line of the conflict between good and evil, some of them may answer (as did Mr. Froude) that there is no prospect of right ever prevailing completely over wrong, good over evil, in this world. In human life the forces of good and evil are so evenly balanced that the struggle between them is likely to go on indefinitely without the good gaining any complete victory. Others, again, of more hopeful temperament, may be found to expect for the world and human society that they will grow better and better, make moral and social progress gradually but surely, till this become a perfect world, and human life become entirely happy and entirely good.

Who shall tell us which of these answers is true, or whether any of them is even near the truth? Is it not strange that with all the powers men possess, and all the discoveries they have made, they are so little able to say, from their own mind and knowledge, whither they are going, and what their history is tending towards? No sure answer can we get from human reason or speculation, which on this subject has taken many strange and contradictory shapes. Let us turn for an answer to Him

pared with the individual life, but short indeed compared with the divisions of time open to our investigation, the energies of our system will decay, the glory of the sun will be dimmed, and the earth, tideless and inert, will no longer tolerate the race which has for a moment disturbed its solitude. Man will go down into the pit, and all his thoughts will perish. The uneasy consciousness, which in this obscure corner has for a brief space broken the contented silence of the Universe, will be at rest. Matter will know itself no longer. 'Imperishable monuments' and 'immortal deeds,' death itself, and love stronger than death, will be as though they had never been. Nor will anything that is be better or be worse for all that the labour, genius, devotion, and suffering of man have striven through countless generations to effect."—The Right Hon. A. J. BALFOUR, *The Foundations of Belief*. (Thus he describes the dreary issue if the "Positivist eschatology" drawn from natural science were the truth.)

who speaks to us in the Gospels. Why do we listen with confidence to Jesus speaking of the future of man? Because we feel as we listen that He knows God, and is in communion with the Ruler of all things. He speaks therefore with authority, and no words command as His do the assent of our conscience.

*The answer  
of Jesus—*

His teaching in regard to the "last things" is to be found chiefly in the great discourse recorded in Matt. xxiv. and xxv. (of which shorter reports are in Mark xiii. and Luke xxi) Also in Luke xvii 22-37; xix. 11-27; John v. 28, 29, and there are incidental references by Jesus to "that day" or "the last day" in many other places.

The following main conclusions may be drawn from this body of prophetic teaching —

*1 A glorious  
issue in the  
victory of  
good over  
evil.*

1. We learn that human history is not uncertain and aimless; it has a goal toward which it is directed. It will have a glorious issue. The long conflict between good and evil will come to an end, and the right will prevail. The kingdom of God was the great subject of Jesus' preaching, and an essential feature of it is that, while the kingdom is here amongst us, even in us, in germ and beginning, it is one day to attain to perfection. The kingdom which we now describe as a kingdom of grace is to become a kingdom of glory. This is the final answer to the prayer which He puts into our mouths, "Thy kingdom come Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth."

*2. This to be  
reached, not  
simply by  
gradual  
progress,  
but by the  
advent of the  
Son of Man.*

2. This future glory is not to be reached in the way simply of gradual improvement and progress. The advance of the Gospel does indeed prepare for it. So, in a measure, do inventions like that of printing and modern means of rapid intercourse, by which human progress has been hastened. There are also crises in human history, "days

of the Lord," in which the end draws nearer. But the great issue is to be brought in by a supreme crisis and catastrophe, when the Son of Man Himself shall appear. He is the King of the kingdom of God. It began in Him. He is the founder and the nucleus of it. He supplies the force by which it grows and prevails. He is also the Lord of Providence and of Nature (Matt xxviii 18), making them subservient to it. And by His visible coming it is to leap to fulfilment. He is to interrupt the slow course of history and bring in the kingdom in perfect form, completely victorious over sin and evil. "The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt xiii 41, 43).

3 This event is not to concern only the generation living at His appearing, but all men. At the coming of the Son of Man there will be a general resurrection of the dead and a general judgment. These together form the stupendous issue often spoken of by Jesus as "that day." And from first to last in our Lord's teaching He assumes that He Himself will then be the Judge of all men. "The hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth,"<sup>1</sup> they that have done good,

*3 At His advent a general resurrection and a general judgment*

<sup>1</sup> While we take these words of our Lord as implying that the resurrection of good and bad will be at one time it is right that readers should be aware that many devout people and Christian scholars have a different expectation. Following on a well known passage in the book of Revelation (chapter xx) they believe that there will be two resurrections of the holy: that there will be a first resurrection of those who have died in the faith of Christ which will precede the general resurrection and final judgment of men by a long interval of time, indicated in the symbolic number of the book as 'a thousand years'. Certainly, at first reading, the chapter in the Revelation seems to teach this, and only because the book is a symbolic one, and the 'first resurrection' may be taken to be spiritual, can there be any doubt about its meaning. But many other devout people and Christian

unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done ill, unto the resurrection of judgement" (John v. 28, 29). "The Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds" (Matt. xvi. 27).

In the latter part of His great prophetic discourse (Matt. xxiv. 45-xxv. 46) Jesus gives visions of the judgment, and though these are largely in the form of parable and symbol, we are shown distinctly the great principles in accordance with which He will judge men.

*Principles  
of the  
judgment:*

*(1) The  
judgment of  
the Church  
will be  
according  
to two tests—  
(a) of char-  
acter.*

(1) First, we learn how He will judge the Church. The parables of the two servants, the ten virgins, and the talents (Matt. xxiv. 45-xxv. 30) all plainly refer to "His own servants," and the sum of their teaching is that these will at the great day be judged according to two tests, (a) that of *character*, and (b) that of *service done to Christ*. We might have expected the great test to be that of *faith in Jesus*, but His teaching evidently is that He will judge by the *fruits of faith* in character and work. So the judgment will be on grounds that befit an open public judgment—one which will approve itself to the general conscience of mankind, as well as to the Judge Himself. The first parable shows office-bearers, the second, ordinary members of the Church, judged according to *character*, and the test of character used is *readiness for the coming of their Lord*.

*or readiness  
for His  
coming, and*

scholars accept the view given above in the text. To them it seems that our Lord's words in John v. 28, 29 (quoted above) convey that the resurrection of good and bad will be at one time, and that they cannot without violence bear the interpretation of two far separated resurrections. In our Lord's discourses in this gospel the expression "the last day" occurs again and again as the name of the great term of resurrection and judgment, and it is spoken of by our Lord as the term both for believers and unbelievers. "This is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John vi. 40. See also vi. 39, 44, 54). "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day" (xii. 48).

This will disclose the state of their hearts. If they have had pleasure in the delay of His coming, and so have given themselves to sinful indulgences (xxiv. 49), or if, in the general dying out of a near expectation of His coming (xxv. 5), they are found immersed in worldly things, and through apathy about their higher life have failed to make provision for it (xxv. 3), they will be condemned—terribly punished for sin, sadly excluded for apathetic neglect. But if they have been faithful to their spiritual charge, and have cherished their spiritual hopes, they will be wonderfully rewarded (xxiv. 47), and admitted into the eternal joy (xxv. 10).

In the glass of the third parable—that of the talents—we see the servants of Jesus judged by Him at the great day, according to the *service they have done Him*. Those who have used well for Him the opportunities of life will receive His great commendation; they will enter into His joy, and (as the parable of the pounds in Luke xix. teaches) they will be promoted to higher service, each in proportion to his faithfulness and success. But “the unprofitable servant” who has thought only of himself, and has had no spirit of enterprise for Christ in his sphere of life, will be “cast into the outer darkness: there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

(2) Next, in the vision of judgment given at the close of the twenty-fifth chapter of St. Matthew—than which nothing grander has ever been written for men—we find on what principle those will be judged who have lived in times and countries which were without the knowledge of Jesus. That this passage refers to that great multitude we conclude (a) from its place in the discourse—after the parables of judgment on the Church; (b) from the words “before him shall be gathered all the nations,” which in the usage of the time meant *the heathen*; (c) from the replies in verses 37 and 44, from which it is plain that

(b) of service done to Him.

(2) The judgment of those outside the Church will be according to their conduct toward the Son of Man in His brethren.

while all servants of Christ know that in ministering to their brethren they minister to Him, those here judged will not know it till that great day, when it will come to them as a joyful or a sad surprise. Among the heathen, then, the great separation will be made according to their conduct toward the Son of Man, as shown in their treatment of His brethren. What they have done to their fellow-men Jesus will take as done to Himself. "I was an hungered," He will say, "and ye gave me meat." The full grandeur of life, the height of its use in merciful ministration to human needs, the depth of its misuse in selfish neglect of them, will burst upon their view when the Son of Man on His throne of glory shall say, "Ye did it unto me": "Ye did it not unto me." "And these shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life."

*By the  
general  
judgment  
all arrears  
of justice  
will be made  
up.*

Such an issue of blessing to the righteous and woe to the unrighteous fully satisfies the human conscience, and ends the perplexity which has been felt at the success of the wicked, and the many defects of justice which we see in the lives of men. All arrears of justice will then be fully made up. "There is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known" (Matt. x. 26). "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgement" (Matt. xii. 36). But does this issue satisfy the heart? Do we still long for a kingdom of glory which shall include all, and into which even the lost shall be ultimately brought, the works of the devil being completely destroyed and the love of God completely victorious?

*Universal  
restoration  
is not  
taught.*

That such a longing is in harmony with God's own heart we may certainly conclude from His name of "Father." We are never like God, "who willeth that all men should be saved" (1 Tim. ii. 5), than when we so desire. But if we ask Shall this longing be satisfied?

our present knowledge hardly justifies a confident answer. The words in the Gospels which we translate "the end of the world" mean rather "the consummation of the age." They signify the winding up of a dispensation. And the word which we translate "eternal" along with "punishment" and along with "life" is, more literally, "age-lasting." There are those, accordingly, who suppose that in this prophecy Jesus tells us of the transition to a new dispensation, and of how that dispensation will go on, but that He does not tell us what its issue will be. In regard to that issue, they would hope greatly for all men, even for those who were condemned at the Great Day of this age. The whole solemn question, which is raised also in other forms, cannot be discussed in our short space. It must be said, however, that the language of our Lord powerfully conveys the impression that this present life is the time of opportunity; and in the last view which He gives of men they are still shown as divided into two companies. A doctrine of universal restoration cannot be built up on the explicit teaching of Jesus in regard to the "last things."

4. One question in regard to the end and the coming of Jesus remains—the *time* of it. On this subject we are met by the great difficulty that His words seem contradictory. He says expressly, "Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all these things be accomplished" (Matt. xxiv. 34). He said also on another occasion, "Verily I say unto you, There be some of them that stand here, which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt. xvi. 28). It has been pressed by Gibbon, Renan, and others, that there can be no doubt that Jesus expected the end of the world within a human lifetime. Of course, if He did so He was mistaken, and they argue that if mistaken in this He was mistaken in the whole matter; that His forecast

4. *The time of the end. Double answer of Jesus.*



of the future is only a devout imagination. But we find in His discourse different, even contrary, utterances in regard to the time of the end. He declares that He does not even Himself know when it shall be. "Of that day or that hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark xiii. 32). And, instead of the end being sure to come within one generation, He often uses language that implies long delay. He likens the Gospel in its working to a little leaven leavening the whole lump of the world, and no one who knew human nature as He did could expect this process to complete itself in a generation. He says, "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world for a testimony unto all the nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. xxiv. 14). He anticipates the evil servant saying in his heart, My lord *delayeth* his coming. In the parable He speaks of the bridegroom *tarrying*. He says (Luke xxi. 24), "Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled," from which we understand that as the Jews had ages of opportunity before the judgment on their nation, so the Gentiles are to have ages of opportunity before the last judgment. How are we to account for this double manner of utterance on our Lord's part—the time of His coming now approximately known, now quite unknown; now near, now far; now unexpectedly soon, now unexpectedly late?

*This accounted for.*

One great step is made towards accounting for it when we perceive that two events are both spoken of as His coming, which are far apart in historical time, viz. (1) the destruction of Jerusalem, which happened almost within that generation (A.D. 70), and was, we believe, the judgment of the Jewish Church and nation; and (2) the last judgment on the Christian Church and all nations. Plainly in the early part of our Lord's discourse the actual city of Jerusalem and its last siege are chiefly spoken of. "When

ye see the abomination of desolation . . . standing in the holy place . . . then let them that are in Judæa flee unto the mountains" (Matt. xxiv. 15, 16). This warning, taken literally, enabled the followers of Jesus to make a timely escape from the siege of Jerusalem. But further on, in vv. 29, 30, 31, and in the last grand vision, in chapter xxv., beginning "When the Son of man shall come in his glory," it is plain that the "end of the world" and last judgment are spoken of. Now we believe we are right to understand "this generation shall not pass," etc., as fulfilled in that coming of Jesus in A.D. 70, and the words, "of that day and that hour knoweth no one," as referring to the last judgment.

But why are these two far-separate events mingled in this prophetic discourse so inextricably—so *confusedly*, we might even say? We answer that apparently our Lord did not intend to separate distinctly for His immediate disciples those two great comings of His, and so they might be unable to tell of them separately and in order in their report of His words. They are twin comings, each ending an age or dispensation, the one the Jewish, the other the Christian. The one is so typical of the other that often the words which are true of the first are true in a wider sense of the second. And while history has an order of its own, and must be chronological, prophecy—like poetry—has quite another order. The great aim of prophecy is, not to anticipate history, but to give moral impression and keep the soul in a right attitude to God. With such an aim our Lord might choose to mingle, rather than separate, these two great stages of His coming, which for His own generation, and from His own point of view, were blended together, as two snow-covered peaks rising before us, the one behind the other, form one feature in a landscape, and not till we cross the nearer range does the great hollow between them claim to be noted.

5. The complex truth of our Lord's coming presented under three heads,

5. The "coming" of Jesus, as spoken of by Himself, is very complex when we take into view, besides the discourses in Matthew xxiv. and xxv., also the saying "I come unto you" in John xiv. 18, and other words in that farewell discourse; and it may complete our account of this subject, and bring what has been said in this chapter into harmony with what has been said before (in chapter xi.), if we say that the great truth and hope of our Lord's coming may be more fully presented under three heads. (1) It is *dynamical*. His promise, "I come unto you" (John xiv. 18), has been fulfilled in His coming by the Spirit, which is the power (*dynamis*) of the new life of His people and of the spread of His kingdom. (2) It is *historical*. Jesus comes, in a very important sense, in those great "days of the Lord" which devout men recognise, those crises of judgment in the history of nations and churches, of which notable examples are the destruction of Jerusalem, the fall of Rome, the Reformation, the French Revolution, and historical events of our own time. There is accordingly a judgment of the world by Jesus that is continuous; and in these two aspects—the dynamical and the historical—the coming of Jesus is rather a process than a single definite event. This may explain to us His solemn and difficult saying to the High Priest, "Henceforth," that is, from this time onward, "ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. xxvi. 64). But this continuous process, whether dynamical or historical, does not exhaust the truth of our Lord's coming. We cannot accept as the whole truth in this matter the maxim that is pressed upon us by many, "The history of the world is the judgment of the world."<sup>1</sup> We cannot regard the fore-view which Jesus gives of the last judgment as if it were the summing up in one vision of a world-long

(1) *dynamical*.

(2) *historical*.

<sup>1</sup> "Die Welt Geschichte ist das Welt Gericht."—Schiller.

process. We believe from His teaching in a coming of Jesus which may be called (3) *eschatological* (from *eschata*, last things). We believe that He will come in visible glory for a final judgment, in which the divine government will be completely vindicated, and decision given on every individual life. And we believe that one special feature of this last judgment will be its openness; that its justice will be a public justice, the sentence public, the grounds of it public, and the whole congregation of God's creatures made witnesses to it.

6. With this sublimely great event in prospect, certain to happen, uncertain only in its time, what should be the attitude of the Church and of the disciples of Jesus? He Himself declares this. They should *hope*, and they should *watch*. They will hope for that great day when Christ shall appear as King; they will love His appearing; they will have a hope mingled with awe in the thought of His words from the judgment-seat, and a great comfort of hope in regard to the kingdom of glory which He will bring in. "When these things begin to come to pass (He says), look up, and lift up your heads; because your redemption draweth nigh" (Luke xxi. 28).

6. *Attitude befitting the Church and disciples of Jesus—*

*to hope,*

But again and again, along with words of hope, in these discourses regarding the end, there mingle, like the tollings of a bell of warning, the calls to watch. "Watch ye at every season, making supplication, that ye may prevail to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man" (Luke xxi. 36). "And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch" (Mark xiii. 37). This does not mean that we are to cultivate an excited expectation that the end is imminent. Still less does it mean that they best obey our Lord's command who seek by intricate calculations to wring out of Scripture the secret of the actual year of His coming. Surely it is wrong for men thus to try to know and persuade others

*to watch,*

that they know what "the Father hath set within his own authority" (Acts i. 7), and what was hid even from the Son. Speculations and prophesyings of this sort have often brought discredit on the Christian faith. And while we profoundly sympathise with those who cherish the hope of seeing their Lord and being owned by Him without passing through the gate of death, it must not be made a test of devoutness that a man should judge "that this is the evening of our earth's history, and that we are close upon the second coming of Christ." Among those of an opposite opinion we may name one of the men of finest Christian mind in our generation, the late Dr. John Ker.<sup>1</sup> The *watching* our Lord calls for is a spiritual effort directed rather inwards than outwards. It is indeed wakefulness in regard to unseen and eternal verities and mindfulness of our Lord's working in the world, with the knowledge that all events in the world's history are steps towards the great consummation of His coming. But it is still more an inward self-scrutiny and serious vigilance in regard to our spiritual state, in order that we may not be yielding to evil likings of our own or drifting with the tide of some worldly influence which would carry us away from God. Watching implies also diligence in our appointed duty, such diligence as that of the faithful and wise servant set over the household to give them their meat in due season, of whom Jesus said, "Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing" (Matt. xxiv. 46); or such diligence in the Master's work and in the use of opportunity as may enable the servant to say at the great day, "Lord, thy pound hath made ten pounds more" (Luke xix. 16). It implies also what may be called a *Christian asceticism* in view of temptation. Though Jesus in His teaching regards all our nature as from God, and to be freely exercised, yet He says, "If thy hand or thy

<sup>1</sup> *Sermons*, 2nd series, p. 278.

foot causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life maimed or halt, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into the eternal fire. And if thine eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is good for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into the hell of fire" (Matt. xviii. 8, 9). That is to say, good as a complete life is, in which all our powers are exercised, a Christian who watchfully considers his own susceptibilities and circumstances will be right sometimes to limit or deny himself, choosing a safe life rather than a full one.

With watching Jesus joins *prayer*. "Watch and pray" <sup>and to pray.</sup> (Matt. xxvi. 41). "Watch ye at every season, making supplication" (Luke xxi. 36). "Take ye heed, watch and pray" (Mark xiii. 33). Our Lord here indicates that great and necessary characteristic of a Christian life, a habit and attitude of *receptiveness* toward God and toward Christ. Much as a Christian desires the final coming of our Lord, he desires and needs still more His presence now. To keep the mind open to Him, to be conscious of His fellowship, receptive of His grace, and obedient to His words—this is above all else in a Christian. And for this he needs to use prayer, which we take here as typical among the "means of grace," and inclusive of them all. Nowhere does our Lord prescribe how often a Christian is to pray, how much he is to give of his time to reading and hearing the word of God, or how often he should seek renewal of the grace of life in the Lord's Supper. Nowhere does our Lord teach how much of a Christian life should be receptive, and how much of it should be active. We are left in this to our own conscience and to the spiritual wisdom which experience teaches to faithful souls. But although "the word, sacraments, and prayer" are but means to an end, those err greatly and suffer much

inward loss who undervalue them or are slack in using them.

"Blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say unto you, that many prophets and righteous men desired to see the things which ye see, and saw them not; and to hear the things which ye hear, and heard them not" (Matt. xiii. 16, 17). Thus our Lord spoke to His twelve disciples long before His ministry ended. Much more may we hear Him speak in this manner to us, who see the wonder and glory of His life, His teaching, and His death, completed, who read in the testimonies of His apostles, and who have behind us the Christian centuries with the faith of Christ and the great servants of Christ still victorious through the worst times—often most victorious in the hour of death itself. But blessed as we are in seeing what Christ has prevailed to do in the world, the Christian mind looks with reverent hope for the fulfilment of the promises which our Lord has given in regard to the future of His kingdom and the glory which shall follow the great event of His return. Christian poetry abounds in noble expression of this reverent hope.

I gaze aloof, on the tissued roof,  
Where time and space are the warp and woof,  
A tapestried tent, to shield us meant  
From the bare, everlasting firmament.  
Soon the whole, like a parchment scroll,  
Shall before my amazed sight uproll,  
And without a screen shall at once be seen  
The Presence wherein I have ever been.

O quickly come, dread Judge of all;  
For, awful though Thine advent be,  
All shadows from the truth will fall,  
And falsehood die, in sight of Thee.

## CHAPTER XV (*Supplementary*)

### HIS TEACHING IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL—ITS SPECIAL CHARACTER AND QUESTIONS ARISING OUT OF IT

THIS book has for one of its aims to meet in short compass the desire of many readers in this time of doctrinal hesitancy and transition to come to the very fountain-head of our Christian faith, and to know that faith in the amount and in the form in which it first came from our Lord's lips. We may, therefore, before concluding, deal shortly with a matter which has been a source of disquiet to such readers as we have in view. They have become aware that much critical conflict has gone on in regard to the Gospels, which are the great sources of our knowledge of our Lord's teaching. In particular, they have learned that one of the chief questions in biblical criticism during the past generation has been that of the authorship and authenticity of the fourth Gospel, and that the discussion has largely turned on the remarkable differences between the report of our Lord's teaching given in the first three Gospels (known as the "Synoptical" Gospels) and the report of it given in St. John. An uneasy impression of uncertainty regarding the very foundation of our knowledge is produced by the mere fact that such discussion has gone on. It is therefore fitting that we try in short space to make our readers aware how the case stands.

*Conflict of  
opinion in  
regard to  
the Gospels.*



especially in regard to these discourses and teachings in the fourth Gospel.

*Features of  
difference in  
our Lord's  
teaching in  
the fourth  
Gospel.*

The fourth Gospel, when it is attentively examined, shows notable differences from the other three in regard to the *geographical scene* of our Lord's ministry, in regard to its *chronology*, and in regard to the *incidents related*. With all this, however, we are not here so much concerned as with the *teaching*: and that there is great difference in it as reported in that Gospel every Christian reader is more or less aware. Even the most unlearned reader, who has used the Gospels simply for spiritual instruction and comfort, is conscious of this. The special preference and love which so many devout people feel for St. John's Gospel is a consequence of this difference and a spontaneous testimony to it. What the difference is we shall here try to bring into view in a few of its marked particulars. One of the most obvious of them is the absence of *parables*. There are indeed *similitudes* (John x. 1 ff., xv. 1 ff.) which are closely akin to parables, and there is frequent use of the earthly to illustrate the heavenly (ix. 4, xvi. 21, etc.); but the parable, in the strict sense, which is so unique and attractive as it occurs in the first three Gospels, is wanting in the fourth. A far more general and important characteristic of this Gospel, which every one will recognise when it is named, is a certain solemn monotony in the teaching reported in it, caused by the short emphatic character of the utterances, by the manner in which the discourses proceed—the truth first stated being repeated again and again in fuller development (v. 17 ff., vi. 32 ff., xiv. 15–xvi. 33)—and by the recurrence of certain characteristic words, as “The Father,” “The Son,” “Life,” “Truth,” “Witness,” “Glory,” “Judgment,” “The World.” “There is (says Westcott) both in the vocabulary and in the form of the sentences a surprising simplicity, which becomes majestic by its solemn directness.”

More notable still than these peculiarities of style in our Lord's teaching, as reported by St. John, are the differences of subject-matter. In the three first Gospels the great subject is the kingdom of God. In St. John this is named only once (iii.), and the summum bonum for men is usually spoken of under the name of life, or eternal life. And further—what constitutes the most characteristic feature of all—the discourses of Jesus in this Gospel are very largely about Himself, about His wonderful union and communion with God—the Son with the Father—and about the salvation of men by union and communion with Him. While in the first three Gospels sayings often occur in which a greatness beyond that of other men is implied for our Lord, in St. John this is expressed directly and habitually. His title "The Son of God," or "The Son," occurs far oftener in St. John. In this Gospel also alone have we these great sayings about Himself, with whose majestic form we are familiar, "I am the bread of life," "I am the light of the world," "I am the resurrection, and the life," etc.

Largely in consequence of this, a general contrast between the first three Gospels and the fourth, which prevails throughout all the discourses, is that in the fourth these are greatly more theological. When we read the Sermon on the Mount we see that it goes much into detail about conduct and that side of our life which touches our fellow-men. The discourses in St. John deal almost wholly with the side of life which leans upon God and upon Jesus Himself. Of moral teachings, in relation to our fellow-men, there is little but the new commandment to love one another, and its enforcement by example in the thirteenth chapter. The first three Gospels are in their character and savour more ethical: the fourth Gospel is more theological, spiritual, and mystical.

The conclusion drawn by many from these remarkable differences has been that this Gospel was not by St. John,

*Inferences  
from these  
against the  
Gospel's  
genuine-  
ness.*

nor of the first, but of the second century in its time of composition, and that the discourses are inventions of an unknown writer, who, from similarity of style, must be the same who wrote what we call the First Epistle of St. John. Renan puts his view of the matter thus—"If Jesus spoke as Matthew represents, he could not have spoken as John represents." Renan himself, indeed, while concluding against the discourses, finds the narrative part of the Gospel too vivid and of too intimate knowledge to be rejected. Others again (like Matthew Arnold in this country and Wendt in Germany), while rejecting the narrative as of late construction, find the discourses too great for invention. The opponents of the genuineness of the Gospel have been much divided in their judgment of it. The great Christian scholars of this country have, speaking generally, never departed from the belief that the Gospel is by St. John. And it may be said that, after years of conflict, the weight of conviction among such scholars throughout the Christian world is now—from evidence too extensive to be given here<sup>1</sup>—increasingly in favour of the genuineness of the Gospel. And Christian people, who know it through devout use of it, will, we are sure, find it impossible to believe that a book with such a power of holiness in it could have been invented to serve a theological purpose by a writer of the second century—by a writer who falsely assumed the character of a witness of our Lord's ministry, as the writer of the fourth Gospel claims to be (John xix. 35 ; see also xxi. 24). We cannot believe that words which have had so great power for Christ among men were invented for Him by one capable of such falsity.

*Present  
strength of  
conviction  
in its  
favour.*

<sup>1</sup> We may refer those interested especially to Bishop Lightfoot's articles on the subject in *The Expositor*, third series, vol. i. ; also to Westcott's introduction to his commentary on St. John ; *Canonicity*, by Professor Charteris ; and *Introduction to the New Testament*, by Professor Marcus Dods.

If once this book, truth's own eternal page,  
 Could for some lying Gnostic's tale be held,  
 It then must be that Christ from age to age  
 Has devils through Beelzebub expelled.<sup>1</sup>

While then—for reasons that are cumulative and to our mind overwhelming—we cannot have any doubt that the fourth Gospel is indeed authentically by St. John, we still require, for the satisfaction of our own mind, to consider the subject further, and to ask how the great differences of the discourses reported in this Gospel can be accounted for.

*The question remains, How can these differences be accounted for?*

The answer some give is, by *translation*. If our Lord spoke in Aramaic, and St. John reported His teaching in Greek, we need not wonder that the translation should have peculiarities of style, and should have a similarity in this respect to the Epistles of St. John, because every man has a style of his own which he uses even in translating. This carries us, however, but little way towards a solution of the difficulty—even if we were more sure than we are that our Lord habitually spoke in Aramaic—for the peculiarities in St. John are even more in the subject-matter of the discourses than in the words and style, and translation would affect only the latter.

*Some say, by translation.*

A bolder explanation is that there is an element in these discourses which comes from the mind of St. John himself,—that these discourses, after long lying in his memory, came forth with a tinge derived from his own thought and mental elaboration. This, it is urged, is quite a legitimate view to take, inasmuch as a speech then, though always reported in the first person, was not expected to be more literally exact than we now expect it

*Some say, by the evangelist's own elaboration or transmutation.*

<sup>1</sup> Translation by the late Miss Scott-Moncrieff of Gustav Schwab's vigorous lines—

Hat dieses Buch, das ew'ge Wahrheit ist,  
 Ein lügenhafter Gnostiker geschrieben,  
 So hat seit tausend Jahren Jesus Christ,  
 Den Teufel durch Beelzebub vertrieben.

to be when it is given only in substance, in the third person. And it is, of course, certain that the reports are greatly condensed. We do not suppose, for example, that we have the whole of the evening's conversation of our Lord with Nicodemus, but only a condensed account of it. This St. John might legitimately give in words and manner considerably his own. Professor Sanday goes as far in this direction as perhaps any reverent student in Britain who accepts St. John's authorship. He says, "I would not vouch for the literal accuracy of these discourses. . . . The *foundation* of the discourses I believe to be genuine. . . . I agree that there may be very possibly an element of *anticipation in time*, truths being put forward in the Gospel at an earlier date than that to which they really belonged. . . . I agree also that there has been some recasting in the form of the discourses."<sup>1</sup> And Archdeacon Watkins<sup>2</sup> speaks also of more than translation having taken place, — of *transmutation, re-formation, growth, change in the "outward moulds of thought"* from what suited Jewish peasants to what suited the different atmosphere of thought many years later in Ephesus, where St. John is believed to have written.

We have given this explanation at some length, because it must be considered and weighed by Christian people, and because there is probably some measure of truth in it, owing to the different manner of reporting then and the different expectation of readers of that time in this respect. Undoubtedly St. John passes from discourse of our Lord into comment of his own with hardly any perceptible break, as at iii. 16 and iii. 31. And Wendt has with some plausibility made our Lord's argument in several places seem clearer by omission of short passages, which he attributes to the writer of the Gospel. But we may

<sup>1</sup> *Contemporary Review*, October 1891.

<sup>2</sup> In his Bampton Lecture.

say that, as a complete explanation of the special style and character of our Lord's discourses in the Gospel, this account of the matter does not satisfy us. The following are reasons for our opinion:—

(1) The greatness of the topics, the precision of the language, and the majesty of the style, raise the discourses in the Gospel to a height which may be declared to be above the power of the writer of the Epistles. High as is the level of the First Epistle, it will be felt in reading it that it does not attain to that of the discourses in the Gospel. (2) The fact that never in the discourses of the Gospel does there occur explicit mention of doctrines so prominent with the writer of the Epistle as those of propitiation for sins and forgiveness of sins, tells strongly against the opinion that in writing the Gospel he allowed himself freedom in regard to what he put into our Lord's mouth. It confirms the belief that he was reporting with general faithfulness and accuracy. (3) It is hard to imagine a disciple reporting his Lord's words and venturing to make so great change of subject as this Gospel shows, or to invent for his Master utterances so new in form and so striking as these—"I am the bread of life"; "I am the light of the world"; "I am the way, and the truth, and the life"; "I am the resurrection, and the life." (4) Passages occur in the Synoptical Gospels which cause us to doubt whether St. John made even such change in the language of Jesus as might have been thought legitimate in a reporter. "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke xii. 32); "Every plant which my heavenly Father planted not, shall be rooted up" (Matthew xv. 13); "I say unto you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew xviii. 10). Sayings such as these are very close in style to the discourses of the fourth Gospel, and the sublime passage in

*Reasons for not reckoning this explanation full and sufficient.*

St. Matthew xi. 25-27, reported also by St. Luke—"At that season Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes : yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight. All things have been delivered unto me of my Father : and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father ; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal him." Any one can recognise here the likeness to St. John's Gospel. All the peculiarity of tone, of theology, of expression, which we identify with St. John, occurs here in the Synoptics. The whole Johannine doctrine of the relation of the Father to the Son might be drawn out of the last of the verses quoted. The very words and expressions are undistinguishable from St. John, and the next three verses, beginning "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," go on in that strain of majesty which belongs to the discourses of the fourth Gospel.

All this makes it impossible for us to find full explanation of the special character of the discourses in St. John by supposing it due to his recasting of them. Our Lord is found speaking in similar manner in Gospels of an earlier date than his. The novelty of our Lord's discourses in St. John is not quite so great as has sometimes been urged, and close study of the two types of teaching has been well shown by Wendt to bring out their inner harmony. It appears on the evidence of both kinds of Gospels that our Lord did speak in these two differing styles, and the problem before us is rather to find when and why He used each of them.

*A more  
helpful ex-  
planation.*

We come now to the explanation which seems to us to have most truth in it, and to carry us farthest toward a solution of the problem which we are considering. Two

strains of utterance are found in the teaching of our Lord. In one, as Prophet of Galilee, He condescended to the people, and met them in the region of practical morals and simpler religious ideas—what He Himself perhaps indicates (John iii. 12) as “earthly things.” Another strain is heard in times of stronger personal emotion, when He was thrown more upon His relation to His Father, and was led more to declare the secrets of His inner being. Such times were those in which He met the opposition of the religious leaders in Jerusalem (John v. ff.), or again when, with death impending, he poured out, in private, farewell counsel and assurance to his disciples (John xiv. ff.). Of this type of our Lord’s teaching the disciple on whom it made the deepest impression, and who almost alone had the faculty for recalling it, was John. The simpler style of our Lord’s teaching, remembered by many, was first used in evangelising, and came to be first put on record. It is this we chiefly have in the Synoptic Gospels. The spiritual genius of John treasured up the other type of teaching, for which he had a special affinity. The deep, mystical sayings of Jesus sank into his receptive mind, and at a later period in the history of the Church, at a time with new needs, it became fitting to recall that teaching of our Lord which He had given under special tension of spirit, in conflict with enemies, or in the shadow of suffering. The Church needed now, and was now more prepared to receive utterances of Jesus about His Person, His pre-existent being and glory, and His relations to His Father. This was what St. John could bring out of his treasury of memory and reflection—new, yet old—and to the need for this we owe the peculiar selection both of incident and discourse in the fourth Gospel.

*Two strains in our Lord's teaching, for one of which St. John had special capacity.*

This is the direction in which we would go in hope of accounting for what is unique in the character of the fourth Gospel. It contains deep elements in the ministry



of Jesus, which took hold of this evangelist, and were reserved for him to bring out in due time. The disciples, as a body, had, we believe, the fulfilment of our Lord's promise in regard to the Spirit, "He shall teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said unto you" (John xiv. 26). But they had it each according to his own gift and capacity, and the gift and capacity of St. John was eminent and special.

*Confidence we may have in the teaching reported in the fourth Gospel.*

It will be seen that we find no reason in the many discussions regarding this Gospel for weakened confidence in the teaching of our Lord which it reports. The Gospel is indeed in consequence of these discussions far better understood and more intelligently revered; and the teachings it contains are certified to us not only by the evidence for the genuineness of the Gospel which we regard as now irresistible, but also by the spiritual intuition of the Church and the general Christian consciousness. That spiritual intuition, that Christian consciousness, cannot now let go what this Gospel teaches. It is too closely bound up with Christian life, which is the highest thing in this world. Christian life has too long been nourished from it and known the nourishment to be divine. And nothing seems to us more self-refuting than a position like that of Dr. Martineau—great mind as his is—whose view of our Lord's person obliges him to regard as unhistorical such great words as those we have often quoted: "I am the light of the world"; "I am the resurrection, and the life"; "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest"; "I am meek and lowly in heart" (John viii. 12, xi. 25; Matt. xi. 28, 29).<sup>1</sup>

*General confidence we may have in all the four Gospels.*

For the assurance of our readers we may also say here of the other three Gospels that, though discussion is now going on in regard to their resemblances and differences,

<sup>1</sup> See *Seat of Authority in Religion*, pp. 582-3.

and in regard to how these resemblances are to be accounted for—by a common original document, or by a common oral tradition, or by both—the trustworthiness of these Gospels as veracious accounts of our Lord's life and words is nowhere seriously challenged, and, even in Germany, critical judgment, after many shiftings and contrary opinions, is now settling back into the old traditional belief about their authorship and date of composition. As evidence of this a quotation may be given from a recent book by Dr. Adolf Harnack—the most prominent of German biblical critics at the present day. In the preface to his work, *The Chronology of the old Christian Literature down to the time of Eusebius*, he thus writes :—

“There was a time—and the mass of the [German] public finds itself still in that time—in which people felt obliged to regard the oldest Christian literature, including the New Testament, as a tissue of deceptions and falsifications. That time is gone by. For science the period was an episode in which she learned much, and now that it is over must forget much. The results of the enquiries which follow, however, go in a “reactionary” direction even beyond what might be called the “intermediate” position in the criticism of the day. The oldest literature of the Church is in its chief points and in most of its details, from the point of view of literary history, veracious and trustworthy. In the whole New Testament there is probably only one solitary writing which can be called, in the strictest sense of the word, pseudonymous, the Second Epistle of Peter.”

The significance of such a declaration, coming from such a quarter, has been truly described as immense. It marks the close of a controversy of fifty years, and it allows students of the Gospels, who are not experts in biblical criticism, to read them with the confidence of

knowing that their age and veracity have been challenged only to be more surely established.<sup>1</sup>

#### NOTE (OCTOBER 1905)

SINCE these pages were written the weight of argument and conviction among scholars in this country in regard to the fourth Gospel is increasingly in favour of the belief that it is the work of an eye-witness of the events narrated, as is indeed expressly claimed (John xix. 35; xxi. 24; compare 1 John i. 1, 2). A great work by Principal Drummond of Manchester New College, Oxford, has powerfully reinforced the argument on this side, and the more effectively that, as he is a Unitarian, he has no orthodox doctrinal bias in favour of the Gospel. A still more recent volume, by Professor Sanday of Oxford, written with almost an excess of fairness to hostile argument and speculation, leaves on the mind the impression that the question cannot be settled otherwise than according to the belief stated above.

In regard to the first three Gospels, while their date of compilation is now generally accepted as before A.D. 80, some emphasis has been put in recent years on the presence in them of small inaccuracies or inconsistencies (*e.g.* Mark vi. 8, "save a staff," compared with Luke ix. 3, "neither a staff"), such as might well creep in during the time of oral transmission of the narratives and reports. Also it is suggested that very early idealising began in regard to

<sup>1</sup> See *Expository Times*, March 1897. Summaries of the evidence for the genuineness of the Gospels (as well as of the other books of the New Testament) will be found in the Guild Library volume, *The New Testament and its Writers*, by the Rev. Dr. M'Clymont. A lecture by Professor Charteris, published in pamphlet form ("The Present State of Biblical Criticism as regards the New Testament," James Thin, 1897), shows the most recent criticism and trend of conviction.

Jesus, and that His sayings have been modified in transmission from such motives as that of softening difficulties of expression, adding to homiletic effect, or more evidently fulfilling prophecy. There is no accusation of bad faith: and it is to be remembered that the evangelists did not set themselves to make absolutely full records of our Lord's life. They wrote not biographies, but Gospels, whose purpose is to spread the faith in Christ. But when every necessary concession is made to these criticisms and considerations the *substantial trustworthiness* of the narratives is not affected, nor the confidence that grows with minute examination of them that they are the result of a very high degree of care, fidelity, and reverence in the whole course of the transmission of what fell from our Lord's lips and of the story of His ministry. More indeed than this, the character of all the four Gospel narratives is so consistently high and worthy of our Lord, rising as it does in the union of elevated feeling with restrained sobriety above all other literature, that it cannot be fully accounted for even by such care in transmission. We are constrained to believe that the transmission was sustained at the height we find by the Spirit of Christ in the Church, and especially in the evangelists. There is a tone and character all through the Gospels, recognisable by minds sensitive to truth, which makes them of self-evidencing authority to us. We feel as we read that we cannot question their truthful purpose or the reality of the events and utterances they tell of. If for a moment a suggestion of doubt enters our mind, it is overborne in reading again by something in the narrative as a whole which we cannot resist. And this self-evidencing power especially belongs to the person of Jesus Himself as presented in the Gospels. He stands out in their pages most real, most human, yet most distinguishable from all other men, and consistently above all. His words have a savour and spirit that are found in no

other. We feel that He cannot be a character invented by these evangelists. The task of imagining and portraying a perfect character, who shall be in all the ways of life at once human and divine—a man, yet at a divine height—is too great for human powers of invention. “Whenever a great literary genius has tried to paint perfection he has become insipid and monotonous.”<sup>1</sup> The evangelists have not failed, because, first of all, the character and life were real; because also the events and words were reverently cherished in memory and carefully transmitted in the practice of oral teaching and repetition which was inherited by the Christian Church from the Jewish; and especially because the writers were sustained by communion with Christ and by His Spirit within them in such an apprehension of Him and of His teaching as made them capable of so reporting Him and so telling the story of the days of His flesh that we cannot doubt His having lived and spoken as they relate.

“I suppose that there are many men who, while reading the Four Gospels, have felt as Moses felt, when he saw the bush burning but unconsumed, and heard God speaking to him from the flame; as Elijah felt when after the strong wind which rent the mountains, and after the earthquake and the fire there came a ‘still small voice.’ . . . They ask no proof—they want none—that in their substance the Four Gospels contain a true story. The genius of man can do great things; but one thing it cannot do—it cannot create the story of a human life in which countless millions of men, through generation after generation, and in many lands, shall find the very glory of God—a glory transcending all that they had discovered in the grandeur of the visible creation and the majesty and sanctity of the Moral Law.”<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Robertson Nicoll in *British Weekly* of 9th March 1905.

<sup>2</sup> Dr. Dale, *Christian Doctrine*, p. 42.

HERE we end our study of the words of Jesus, which, the more they are pondered, used, and compared with all other wisdom, approve themselves the more as supreme in value and authority. Whichever way we turn we feel that from Him comes the one great and sure light of life. Nearly two thousand years have passed, bringing many conflicts and many discoveries; our own age is passing with its new problems and great widening of men's thoughts; yet still the words rise to our lips as they rose to the lips of Peter, conscious of mysteries he could not penetrate—"Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." But precious as are the words of Jesus, the faith of the Church recognises that He is Himself greater than all His utterances; and His own teaching, which we have here reviewed, has shown us that a greater blessing comes to us by Him than even that teaching itself. Greater than the gift of His words is the gift of the divine life which we have through communion with Him; and the assurance descends to us from the throne to which He has been exalted, "Because I live, ye shall live also."

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